

RECONCILING CHALLENGES IN LANDSCAPES

Overview of sessions

Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscapes - PECSRL 2026

7-13 September 2026, Ghent and Spa (Belgium)

Introduction

The sessions organised by the participants will contribute to the interaction, discussions, and experiences during PECSRL2026. More than 20 sessions have been submitted covering a wide range of topics, tackling different challenges in a variety of landscapes. By clicking the title, you can read the description of each session. The content of some sessions has not yet been finalised. The descriptions will be updated as soon as all information has been received from the session organisers.

You can contact the conference organisers if you still want to submit another session proposal via PECSRL2026@ugent.be.

We invite you to submit your abstract to one of the sessions (until 15 April 2026). Your submission is considered an engagement to register for the conference when your abstract is accepted. You can submit your contribution by filling in the [abstract form](#).

Parallel sessions

1. [Beyond "Heritage at Risk": Navigating Governance, Policy and Adaptation Pathways for Resilient Rural Cultural Landscapes](#) (Salpina, Casartelli, Leon, Milde & Ortega – Italy, Germany, Spain)
2. [Challenges of the Industrialisation of Rural Landscapes: An Interdisciplinary Perspective](#) (Bednarek-Szczepeńska – Poland)
3. [Dreams to Come True: Imagining Future Landscape Research](#) (Conijn, The Netherlands)
4. [Educating the Next Generation Landscape Geographers](#) (Meijles, Schepers & Spek – The Netherlands)
5. [Forests in Landscapes Affected by Climate Change: Conflict or Reconciliation?](#) (Robert – France)
6. [From Extractive Pasts to Renewable Futures: Temporal and Relational Reconfigurations of European Energy Landscapes](#) (Puolamäki & Rohu – Finland and Ireland)
7. [From Periphery to Frontier: Competing Futures and Practices of Care in Europe's Remote Landscapes](#) (Dossche, Imbrechts, Zarina & Mohr - Italy, Portugal, Latvia, Switzerland)
8. [Landscape Biography as a Framework for Reconciling Challenges in Living Landscapes](#) (Shakespeare, de Waal & Verschuure-Stuip - Ireland, The Netherlands)
9. [Landscape Identity Revisited](#) (Kasemets & Palang – Estonia)
10. [Landscapes of Intensive Agriculture: A Common or Unwanted Heritage?](#) (Kučera, Kruse & Centeri – Czechia, France and Hungary)
11. [Mediterranean Wine Landscapes as Socio-ecological Systems](#) (Calderón Reyes – Italy)
12. [New Ruralities: Reconfigured Countrysides](#) (Christensen, Butler, Waterman, Palang, Graversgaard, Qviström & Van Eetvelde – Denmark, Sweden, UK, Estonia, Belgium)

13. [Past Forward – Learning from the Past to Address the Challenges of Today](#) (Baas, Bastiaens, Raap, Jongejan & Purmer - The Netherlands and Belgium)
14. [Reconciling Challenges: The case of the Nature Restoration Regulation](#) (van der Sluis & Schmidt - The Netherlands)
15. [Reconciling Sacrifice Zones: Landscapes of Harm, Inequality, and Responsibility](#) (Printsmann – Estonia)
16. [Research and Actions for Quality Nightscapes](#) (Wynants, Schmitz & Jehin – Belgium)
17. [Rural Landscape Entangled: Decolonial Perspectives, Praxis, and Cross-cultural Local Knowledge in Europe and Beyond](#) (Mela, Sony Jean & Koren - The Netherlands)
18. [Symbiotic Rural Landscapes: Indigenous Values and Nature-Based Solutions in Ageing Regions](#) (Xing, Lu, Liu, Marques & McIntosh - New Zealand)
19. [Tipping Points in Changing Landscapes and Societies](#) (Loupa-Ramos, Bernardo, Dionisio, De Wit, Herpels & Van Eetvelde – Portugal, Belgium)
20. [Understanding Wetland Transformations through Ecological, Social, and Rural Dynamics](#) (Basimine, Schmitz, Eiter & Wójcik – Belgium, Norway, Poland)
21. [Water Wars or Conviviality? Futuring Peatlands by Reconciling Water, Soil, and Life](#) (Broocks, Hasenbach, Weidemann - Germany)
22. [Where Cities Meet the Slope: Rethinking an Overlooked Landscape](#) (Wynants, Schmitz, Barcelloni & Dallatorre – Belgium, Italy)

Session 1. Beyond “Heritage at Risk”: Navigating Governance, Policy and Adaptation Pathways for Resilient Rural Cultural Landscapes

Session organisers: Dana Salpina (Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Climate Change, Foscari University of Venice, Italy), Veronica Casartelli (Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Climate Change, Foscari University of Venice, Italy), Elisa Leon (IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca, Italy), Katharina Milde (Fraunhofer Institute for Intelligent Analysis, Information Systems IAIS, Germany), Aitziber Egusquiza Ortega (Tecnalia, Spain)

Abstract: Despite increasing recognition of cultural heritage in international disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation frameworks, cultural landscapes, including rural and agricultural ones, remain weakly conceptualised. This session explores cultural landscapes as living socio-ecological systems, examining how governance, policies, regulations, and local practices shape adaptation pathways and resilience for rural landscapes facing climate and disaster risks.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

International frameworks for disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation, including the Sendai Framework for DRR and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment reports, increasingly acknowledge cultural heritage as an asset to be protected. Indeed, the IPCC Culture, Heritage and Climate Meetings, co-sponsored with ICOMOS and UNESCO held in 2021, and the accompanying progress report (IPCC-LX/INF.13) highlight the need to broaden understanding of how cultural heritage intersects with climate science and identify governance as one of the cross-cutting issues. However, cultural landscapes, especially everyday rural and agricultural landscapes, still remain conceptually marginal. In the cultural heritage-climate nexus, they are often framed either as built heritage assets (e.g., historical monuments, archaeological sites) to be protected from damage or as ecosystems or land-use categories, limiting their integration into broader international and national adaptation policies and DRR strategies, the development of comprehensive risk assessments and adaptation pathways. At the same time, cultural landscapes are increasingly shaped not only by climate and disaster risks, but also by major policy-driven transformations, particularly the rapid expansion of photovoltaic and wind energy (e.g., EU Directive 2023/2413, RED III). The large-scale deployment of renewable energy infrastructure is affecting all types of landscapes, but its impact is especially pronounced in rural and agricultural areas. This session will try to address these gaps by advancing a socio-ecological framing of rural cultural landscapes, viewing them as living, adaptive systems shaped by climate and disaster risk, policy directives, governance structures, and local adaptation practices. We aim to bring together scholars and practitioners from landscape studies, adaptation science, DRR, governance, law, and related fields to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, share empirically grounded insights, and identify transferable concepts, methodologies, and governance lessons that strengthen resilience in rural cultural landscapes. We particularly welcome contributions addressing, but not limited to: Synergies and tensions between cultural heritage/landscape protection, climate change adaptation, and DRR. Regulatory and methodological tools for policy coherence (e.g., CAP, landscape protection vs nature-based solutions). Conceptual and methodological advances in risk and vulnerability assessment tailored to cultural landscapes. Participatory and digital approaches enabling community engagement in adaptation. The energy transition in rural landscapes, including socio-economic impacts and conflict dynamics.

Session format: Flash and short presentations (3 to 10 minutes) with Q&A and closing discussion.

Expected outcome of the session: Outcomes may feed into a Special Issue or a joint position paper to inform ongoing IPCC and post-Sendai discussions.

Session 2. Challenges of the Industrialisation of Rural Landscapes: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Session organisers: Maria Bednarek-Szczepańska (Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland)

Abstract: Many of Europe's rural landscapes have undergone far-reaching industrialisation driven by intensification of agriculture, energy transition (land-intensive renewable energy installations) and the expansion of other non-agricultural functions. As a result, we observe the emergence and consolidation of agro-industrial landscapes, energy landscapes, big box warehouse landscapes and mining landscapes. The session will be devoted to an interdisciplinary discussion on the formation and functioning of industrialised rural landscapes, as well as their environmental, economic, and social significance.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

In recent decades, many of Europe's rural landscapes have undergone extensive industrialisation driven primarily by three processes. First, the industrialisation of agriculture manifested in the proliferation of large-scale facilities and infrastructures dedicated to agricultural production. Second, the energy transition, which increasingly occupies rural space through land-intensive renewable energy installations, including wind farms and photovoltaic parks. Third, the expansion of non-agricultural functions, both in the vicinity of metropolitan areas (e.g., large-scale warehousing and logistics complexes) and in more peripheral regions (e.g., peat extraction and mineral mining). As a result, we observe the emergence and consolidation of agro-industrial landscapes, energy landscapes, big box warehouse landscapes, and mining landscapes. The industrialisation of rural space has far-reaching consequences for the natural environment, local development, residents' quality of life, and the attractiveness of rural areas as tourist destinations. Understanding these processes requires an interdisciplinary approach - one that accounts for the interplay of economic and political forces, legal frameworks, and the roles of diverse spatial stakeholders, including rural inhabitants themselves. These local communities bear many of the costs of the industrialisation of rural space, yet they may also derive certain benefits from it. How do the interactions between industrialisation pressures, the aspirations and needs of local communities, and the legal and political conditions that shape them translate into the configuration of the rural landscape? This discussion will benefit from both theoretical and methodological contributions - addressing how the industrialisation of rural space can be conceptualised, studied, and classified - and from empirical research. The aim of the session is to explore contemporary processes of the industrialisation of rural landscapes across different parts of Europe, the factors shaping these processes, the roles of various stakeholders, the consequences of industrialisation, and the broader challenges associated with it. The detailed scope of the session includes:

- Rural landscapes in the era of agricultural industrialisation
- The significance of the energy transition for rural landscapes
- Other economic functions of rural areas and their impact on landscape industrialisation
- Local communities and social movements in the face of the industrialisation of rural landscapes
- Legal-administrative and political conditions shaping the industrialisation of rural landscapes
- Conceptualising and classifying the industrialisation of rural landscapes
- Landscape conflicts arising from industrialisation processes in rural areas
- Ecological, social, and economic consequences of landscape industrialisation

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A

Expected outcome of the session: The session will create opportunities to establish collaborations and develop future joint research initiatives.

Session 3. Dreams to Come True: Imagining Future Landscape Research

Session organisers: Arjan Conijn (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen; Journal of European Landscapes; Witteveen+Bos, The Netherlands)

Abstract: So much, if not all, of our landscapes is created by weaving ideas together, reconciling various driving processes. This session invites participants to share their most creative landscape research ideas—concepts that have not yet been implemented or fully explored. We aim to create a space for unconventional thinking about balancing competing demands on landscapes, from urbanisation to abandonment, or intensification to multifunctionality. Each idea will be briefly presented and discussed to spark feedback and collaboration on future research trajectories.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Everything that has ever been created started as an idea. Landscapes are shaped not only by the interaction between natural and cultural processes but also by the concepts and visions people bring into practice. Today, European landscapes face complex challenges: climate change, biodiversity loss, land-use conflicts, social inequality and shifting cultural identities, resulting in tensions between competing demands. Addressing these challenges requires bold, new ideas that explore how landscapes can balance or reconcile conflicting pressures. This session offers an open space to share those ideas. Participants are encouraged to bring high-risk, unconventional, or early-stage research concepts that might not yet fit traditional projects or funding calls. Ideas could address processes highlighted in the conference theme, such as flooding and drought, coupling and segregation or intensification and extensification. But this session also offers a stage for your wildest and unconventional ideas, new methods like wild pedagogies and deep mapping, social innovations to solve technical problems, and engaging plural perspectives for multispecies justice. By focusing on early-stage research ideas, the session creates space for exploratory, imaginative, yet academically grounded ideas that may not yet fit within established funding schemes or disciplinary frames. The session has three objectives: (1) to spark fresh and creative thinking about how we study, understand, and shape landscapes under complex and sometimes conflicting pressures; (2) to bring people together across disciplines, regions, and career stages to exchange ideas and inspire each other; (3) to help turn these early-stage concepts into concrete outcomes—new collaborations, project proposals, comparative studies, or papers. By sharing and reflecting on ideas together, we hope to lay the groundwork for research that helps landscapes adapt, thrive, and find balance in a changing world.

Session format: Flash presentations (5 minutes) followed by an interactive discussion

Expected outcome of the session: Participants will leave with feedback on their ideas, suggestions for literature, methods or collaborations, and inspiration to develop early-stage research into future projects, papers, or proposals. The session fosters creativity, cross-disciplinary dialogue, and the emergence of new approaches to understanding and managing changing landscapes.

Session 4. Educating the Next Generation Landscape Geographers

Session organisers: Erik Meijles (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands), Mans Schepers (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands), Theo Spek (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands)

Abstract: In higher education, landscape studies are taught in individual modules as well as full programs, typically containing integrative elements from physical geography, archaeology, ecology, planning and heritage fields, having an interdisciplinary nature. After their studies, students find jobs in a variety of positions. Therefore, landscape-related programs need to carefully define their curricula. This session discusses what theoretical and practical knowledge students need for career success, which landscape analysis skills are essential, and what teaching methods best support student learning.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

In higher education throughout Europe, many (applied) universities offer landscape studies programmes at Bachelor and Master levels, addressing landscape values and contributing to solving issues related to the protection, planning and management as included in the Council of Europe's Landscape Convention. Within fields such as landscape geography, landscape history, planning, historical geography and landscape architecture, students are being trained for careers in the broad field of landscapes. In such programmes, landscape is treated as a holistic concept that views the environment as an integrated, complex system connecting physical, ecological, economic, and socio-cultural processes. It also includes scenic and aesthetic qualities (Antrop, 2005), forming a common resource and a strong component of the European natural and cultural heritage (Council of Europe, 2000). A central approach in using the landscape concept is that the whole is more than the sum of the composing parts, and therefore integrates people and their environment at all scales (Antrop & Van Eetvelde, 2017). It offers a broad and holistic viewpoint in solving ongoing spatial development issues that require perspectives integrating natural, physical and human elements (Meijles & Stoffelen, 2021). However, since landscape geography is inherently interdisciplinary, it is also a very broad and complicated area of study. In addition, alumni of landscape geography programmes find jobs in a very wide variety of positions. This means that landscape-related programmes in higher education need to carefully think about and make choices in defining learning outcomes for landscape geography courses and programmes (Woudstra et al., 2024). Therefore, this session will exchange and discuss programme learning outcomes of landscape study curricula and individual landscape modules in higher education. We'd like to consider which theoretical and practical knowledge students need to master for them to be successful in their careers. In addition, we seek to define which landscape composition analysis and spatial problem-solving skills are essential for valuing, preserving and planning cultural landscapes, and to assess what potential employers expect from alumni. We aspire to collect 'best practice' examples from diverse teaching programmes, including successful didactic work forms, that enable students to obtain the above, acknowledging that we can learn from each other's educational approaches and experiences.

Session format: Flash presentations (5 minutes) followed by an interactive plenary discussion.

Expected outcome of the session: The session will result in a working document, as a poster or poster wall, which will be open for further discussion during poster sessions at the conference. A joint (white) paper will be compiled with the session attendees.

Session 5. Forest in Landscape Affected by Climate Change: Conflict or Reconciliation?

Session organisers: Amélie Robert (University of Picardy Jules Verne/EDYSAN, France)

Abstract: *(Session description will be available soon)*

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: A joint article, followed by a research project about conflicts in European forest landscapes.

Session 6. From Extractive Pasts to Renewable Futures: Temporal and Relational Reconfigurations of European Energy Landscapes

Session organisers: Laura Puolamäki (University of Turku, Finland), Jamie Rohu (Trinity College Dublin, Ireland)

Abstract: This session examines how Europe's green transformation reshapes the landscape as a temporary, generational phase built upon extractive pasts. More specifically, new energy technologies reconfigure land use, alter spatial form and leave infrastructures necessitating future restoration. Renewable development generates tensions between climate goals, biodiversity, community wellbeing and spatial justice. We invite discussion on how evolving energy landscapes shape future and transform urban–rural relations.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

European energy systems have long relied on fossil fuels, enabling rapid economic development while accelerating climate change. The consequences—more frequent wildfires, droughts and floods—reshape landscapes and challenge the safety and livelihoods of communities. The EU's Green New Deal demands the swift adoption of low-carbon energy, profoundly affecting land use patterns, consumption habits and regional development trajectories. At the same time, energy demand is rising due to digitalisation and the expansion of artificial intelligence, increasing the need to expand renewable energy production. In this transformation, landscapes emerge as a crucial energy resource. Wind, solar, biomass and geothermal power are tied to specific places, their ecological characteristics and their cultural meanings. Energy production is not merely a technical intervention; it alters landscape structures, visual qualities and the ways communities relate to their surroundings. Importantly, energy landscapes are inherently temporary. Each technological regime—coal, peat, oil, wind, solar—creates its own landscape phase, typically lasting maybe three or four generations. As technologies evolve, so do the spatial forms they require, leaving behind infrastructures that must be restored, repurposed or reimaged. Renewable energy projects face multiple barriers: biodiversity protection requirements, infrastructure limitations, capital availability and organised local opposition all shape where and how energy can be generated. Wind and solar developments in particular generate tensions when visual change, noise, shadow flicker or perceived declines in property values are experienced as threats. Uneven distribution of benefits and burdens can deepen conflicts and erode trust in decision making. Treating space as an energy resource is thus a political and social challenge, shaped by competing visions of what landscapes should look like now and into the future. At the same time, regions historically dependent on fossil fuel extraction face the consequences of structural decline. The phasing out of coal, peat and oil industries threatens employment and regional vitality. Workers and trade unions call for a just transition, yet creating sustainable jobs in rural areas remains difficult. As economic activity contracts, services diminish and outward migration increases, landscapes risk becoming depopulated and socially vulnerable. This session explores the diverse impacts of the energy transition on European landscapes—both densely used and increasingly empty—and focuses particularly on how landscapes function as energy resources and how this can generate new tensions. The overarching theme is the search for balance among conflicting interests: climate goals, biodiversity protection, energy production needs, community wellbeing and regional justice, all within the temporal reality that energy landscapes are never permanent.

Session format: Oral presentations, combining audiovisual material, videos and posters.

Expected outcome of the session: A network of scholars engaged in the study of energy landscapes, fostering new collaborations across disciplines and supporting shared research agendas for future work.

Session 7. From Periphery to Frontier: Competing Futures and Practices of Care in Europe's Marginalised Landscapes

Session organisers: Rebekka Dossche (University of Genoa, Italy), Lien Imbrechts (CIMO, Instituto Politécnico de Bragança, Portugal / IVM, VU Amsterdam, The Netherlands), Anita Zarina (University of Latvia, Latvia), Franziska Mohr (ETH Zurich, Switzerland)

Abstract: Many European peripheral areas retain some of the last vestiges of traditional and multifunctional landscapes, yet they have been transformed by long-term processes of depopulation and agricultural abandonment. For decades, these territories have played a marginal role within European agricultural and spatial policies. Today, however, they are increasingly reimagined as new frontiers within various European policy strategies. The question arises what this shift means for those landscapes and how top-down processes (will) impact the everyday practices of care.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Long-term depopulation and land-use change (e.g. abandonment and intensification) have pushed traditional multifunctional landscapes to Europe's peripheries. These territories have long occupied a marginal position within European policies, and have often been framed as empty, unproductive or backward places to be 'fixed' through rural development initiatives. On a local level, however, these landscapes are often experienced as forgotten or politically and economically neglected spaces. In recent years, these same areas have re-emerged as strategic territories within new European policy frameworks, such as potential biodiversity hotspots, laboratories for rewilding, and key sites for climate mitigation. They are increasingly targeted for carbon sequestration, renewable energy production (wind and solar farms), extractive activities for critical minerals, and even security-related functions such as border protection and militarisation. These overlapping and sometimes conflicting policy-, market- and security-driven futures are reshaping the meanings, governance, and material transformations of marginalised rural landscapes. What often remains underexplored in these processes is the role, position and (everyday) practices of care of those who inhabit and manage these landscapes (e.g. local actors, administrations). On the one hand, care is enacted through agricultural initiatives, pastoral systems, community-based conservation, and everyday landscape management. On the other hand, policymakers articulate care through top-down responses to climate and biodiversity crises. This session asks critical questions about the consequences of top-down revalorization and shifting narratives for local populations, and about the broader implications for practices of care, livelihoods, and belonging within European rural development, environmental governance and territorial cohesion. The session invites contributions that critically examine how abandonment, rewilding, conservation, climate policy, militarisation, and energy transition intersect in marginalised rural areas, with particular attention to tensions between top-down agendas and bottom-up practices and realities. By bringing together empirical case studies and theoretical reflections, the session aims to explore how competing futures for rural landscapes can - or cannot - be reconciled.

Session format: Oral presentations followed by an interactive workshop

Expected outcome of the session: Co-produce an analytical framework for studying processes in marginalised landscapes and to identify emerging research priorities.

Session 8. Landscape Biography as a Framework for Reconciling Challenges in Living Landscapes

Session organisers: Emily Shakespeare (SABRE Research Centre, Dept Architecture & Built Environment, SETU, Ireland), Maaïke de Waal (Leiden University, The Netherlands), Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip (TU Delft, The Netherlands)

Abstract: Landscape biography offers a holistic framework for understanding living landscapes as palimpsests shaped by long-term interactions between people, non-humans and environmental processes. Continuing recent efforts to expand the concept beyond its traditional disciplinary and geographical boundaries, this session examines how landscape biography can contribute to understanding and reconciling contemporary challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, post-colonial legacies and dynamic urban–rural relations.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

A Landscape Biography tells a landscape's layered 'life story', how it has evolved over time in an ongoing interaction between humans, non-humans and their environment. It is an integrated and holistic approach to landscapes that aims to transcend traditional divisions between disciplines and period specialisations. Conceived as a landscape approach by Marwyn Samuels in 1979 and further developed from the 1990s (inter alia, Kolen & Renes, 2015; Kolen et al., 2018; Roymans et al, 2009), landscape biography has become particularly influential within Dutch spatial planning and heritage practice. There, area biographies are applied nationwide to support integrated, participatory and future-oriented spatial and environmental policies. Outside this context, however, landscape biography remains less widely known and is rarely implemented as a structured approach. Recent initiatives have begun to broaden the conceptual and geographical scope of landscape biography. These include a 2024 international workshop in Leiden, a previous PECSRL session in Poland, and an edited volume currently in preparation that brings together contributions emerging from these discussions. Collectively, these efforts highlight how landscape biography is being reinterpreted and adapted in diverse contexts, including Ireland, Haiti, Japan, Turkey and Norway. They demonstrate that landscape biography is not a fixed methodology, but a flexible and evolving framework that requires locally situated lenses, bespoke methods and ongoing critical reflection. Continuing these efforts, this session focuses on the theoretical and methodological development of landscape biography in relation to contemporary societal and environmental challenges. These include climate change, biodiversity loss, renewable energy transitions, post-colonial and contested landscapes, and shifting urban–rural relations. Particular attention is given to extending the biographical approach to underexplored contexts, such as uninhabited or sparsely populated landscapes, more-than-human perspectives, multiple and conflicting temporalities, and the inclusion of voices that are often marginalised or silenced. The session will comprise some invited speakers with existing work in this area as well as welcoming other submissions from all and any disciplines and locations, particularly those that push and challenge the boundaries of the landscape biographical concept into innovative areas such as:

- future-oriented research themes related to major societal challenges of climate change, renewable energy, biodiversity and the extraction of raw
- the use of technology in partnership with the landscape biographical concept
- more-than-human landscape authors in search of a less anthropocentric approach
- community resilience in the face of ongoing “wicked problems”, local and “silent” voices
- landscapes of conflict or tension e.g. (post)colonial
- interweaving and overlapping temporalities

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion.

Expected outcome of the session: Expanding the international network of scholars and practitioners engaging critically with landscape biography, supporting ongoing collective initiatives, including a seminar linked to the forthcoming book launch, to continue discussion and collaboration beyond the conference.

Session 9. Landscape Identity Revisited

Session organisers: Kadri Kasemets (Tallinn University, Estonia), Hannes Palang (Tallinn University, Estonia)

Abstract: This session seeks theoretical and empirical contributions in examining transitional effects on landscape identity claims on different scales. By integrating the approach of “landscape as a text” on the one hand, and embodied stewardship emphasising care, responsibility, intergenerational knowledge and people’s capital on the other, the session aims to find a balance between ideological and informal, endogenous and exogenous, past and future, or tradition and innovation-oriented landscape transformations.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Landscape research has increasingly shifted from studying how landscapes are produced to how they are perceived, experienced and remembered (Burlingame 2025; Harvey 2024). Landscapes function as cultural archives that hold collective identity, memory and belonging, while landscape identity refers to the perceived uniqueness of place shaped by attachment, self-identity and historical rootedness (Stobbelaar & Pedrolí 2011; Loupa Ramos et al. 2016; 2019). Contemporary planning integrates heritage, local knowledge and everyday practices into sustainability debates, highlighting eco-cultural resilience and the dynamic relationship between people and material environments (Soini & Birkeland 2014; Palang et al. 2017). Rapid cultural change also reshapes national narratives and new meaning-making processes, where personal memories and lived experiences influence landscape governance and management (Viik et al. 2015; Loupa Ramos et al. 2019). Societal transitions — including energy, digital and mobility shifts — have foregrounded landscape-identity-oriented management aimed at balancing competing interests. Research addresses urbanisation, conservation, ownership, property relations and knowledge transfer through tensions between tradition and innovation or formal and informal practices. A linguistic perspective highlights how naming practices shape place attachment and the social construction of landscape identities (Csurgó et al. 2023; Carmichael & Reed 2025). Naming is both cultural and political: official toponyms express institutional power, whereas vernacular names and microtoponyms emerge from everyday experience and social memory, revealing negotiations over place meanings and belonging (Barraclough 2012; Stoffelen & Groote 2023; Slatter 2019). Therefore, the aim of this session is to examine claims on landscape identity in the context of different transitions in discursive and felt matters in terms of how these matters influence landscape identities. In this perspective, it becomes significant how communities and groups express internal meanings connected to habits and materialise them in communication with the institutional scale. We expect contributions on visual and textual representations of a scenery; claims connected to social and physical infrastructure in the heritage and conservation practices; ownership relations and co-creative practices in supporting community coherence; generational shifts, personal biography and intergenerational knowledge; contribution of “capitals”, e.g. of social, cultural, territorial capital that integrates tangible and intangible assets; trust building and formal and informal responsibility in the landscape management.

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion.

Session 10. Landscapes of Intensive Agriculture: A Common or Unwanted Heritage?

Session organisers: Zdeněk Kučera (Charles University; Czechia), Alexandra Kruse (Institute for Research on European Agricultural Landscapes (EUCALAND), France/Germany), Csaba Centeri (Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Hungary)

Abstract: Despite being often overlooked in recent discussions on the values of traditional and historical landscapes, landscapes of intensive agriculture form a significant part of the common European landscape heritage. With particular focus on regional case studies, the aim of the session is to discuss the following topics: (1) impact of societal processes on transformations of past and present landscapes of intensive agriculture; (2) heritage values of those landscapes and their historical structures; (3) tensions between perceptions of their cultural and economic values, and ecological problems.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

A significant part of the common European landscape heritage is formed by environments which have been shaped by intensive agricultural activities in the long-term. Although agricultural landscapes are now recognised for providing ecosystem services, recreational amenities and supporting individual as well as collective identities, productive activities are at the core of the formation of cultural landscapes. Due to diverse economic, political, societal, cultural and technological developments, landscape functions have significantly changed in Europe during the modern period. Especially since the mid-20th century, this has been manifested in spatial polarisation of land use changes with production function given priority in fertile and densely populated lowlands, whereas in rural regions with less favourable conditions for agriculture, the production function has been highly reduced, former arable land largely abandoned, and nature conservation and recreational function started to be promoted. In consequence, European areas with highly valued landscapes are mainly recognised in mountainous areas, whereas intensive agricultural activities occur mainly in fertile, and often urbanised and industrialised, lowlands and flatlands. In recent debates regarding the values of landscapes as heritage, significant attention has been given to traditional and historical landscapes defined as rather stable and slowly developing environments of pre-modern origin, showing unique examples of historical continuity of local landscape forms as well as practices, which are rare and often preserved in marginal locations. Whereas landscapes of intensive agriculture are often criticised for their ecological qualities and as a manifestation of urbanised and industrialised society, despite being among the most common environments with unique character and values. With particular focus on regional case studies, the aim of the session is thus to discuss following topics: 1) impact of societal processes (such as urbanisation and industrialisation on the one hand, and depopulation and land abandonment on the other) on transformations of past and present landscapes of intensive agriculture; 2) heritage values of those landscapes and their historical structures; 3) tensions between perceptions and interpretations of their cultural and economic values, and ecological problems.

The session is intended as a continuation of the thematic sessions organised within the framework of the PECSRL by the Institute for Research on European Agricultural Landscapes e.V. (shortly EUCALAND, which is the acronym of European culture expressed in agricultural landscapes). EUCALAND is an expert network that deals with the cultural and agricultural landscapes of Europe for promoting their consideration and use among their people for preserving their cultural heritage.

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: A publication of the session contributions in a Special Issue of the Journal of Landscape Ecology, an open-access and SCOPUS-indexed journal published by the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

Session 11. Mediterranean Wine Landscapes as Socio-ecological Systems

Session organisers: Patricio Ignacio Calderón Reyes (University of Padua, Italy)

Abstract: *(Session description will be available soon)*

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: Strengthened academic exchange, identification of transferable analytical frameworks, and insights for sustainable management and planning of viticultural landscapes under climate and territorial pressures.

Session 12. New Ruralities: Reconfigured Countrysides

Session organisers: Andreas Aagaard Christensen (Roskilde University, Denmark), Andrew Butler (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden), Tim Waterman (University College London, United Kingdom), Hannes Palang (Tallinn University, Estonia), Morten Graversgaard (Aarhus University, Denmark), Mattias Qviström (Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden), Veerle Van Eetvelde (Ghent University, Belgium)

Abstract: Across Europe, rural landscapes are being reframed as resources for green transformations. In this process, categories and identities relating to city and countryside, industry and land, modernity and tradition are being redefined. Such binaries have shaped how we understand rurality, in different epochs, as the foundation of landed wealth, as productive hinterland to industrial urbanism, and as a symbolic reservoir of heritage and identity. These are being reconfigured in response to ecological rationalities that see the countryside as an ecological resource for greening society. Our aim is to investigate how rural landscapes change and evolve in this context.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Landscapes are increasingly framed as sites of carbon sequestration, biodiversity restoration, renewable energy production, hydrological regulation, nutrient buffering and other measures related to green transitions. Within frameworks such as the European Green Deal and the Convention on Biological Diversity, rural landscapes are rendered measurable, targetable, and optimizable in ways never seen before. The countryside appears less as a cultural counterpoint to the city and more as ecological infrastructure for planetary governance. The rural is increasingly defined as a material and ecological resource and toolbox for greening society - reimaged as Europe's primary action space for delivering sustainability transitions. At the same time, rural social forms, lifestyles and identities are being reconfigured and brought under increasing pressure.

The symposium proposes to critically examine this shift through the lens of "new ruralities." We ask: How is the rural being reframed as a space of ecological solutions and crisis response, and how are such views and practices countered and replaced by other visions of the rural? What forms of governance, planning, and knowledge extend this reframing into action and actual implementation in Europe's landscapes? How does this transformation contribute to redrawing the urban-rural relationship?

In many European contexts, transformations of the rural are initiated through multi-level governance such as water councils, biodiversity partnerships, agri-environmental schemes, land consolidation processes, and climate agreements. Often framed as participatory and place-based, such processes translate planetary targets and national policy objectives into local land-use obligations and negotiations. They therefore provide concrete sites in which new ruralities are not only imagined, but actively contested, negotiated, and institutionalised. We are particularly interested in exploring such cases where national and planetary visions for rural futures intersect with local land-use practices, identities, histories and claims to place.

At stake is more than land-use change and cultural transformations. The countryside has historically been mobilised to serve shifting centres of power - agrarian, industrial, imperial. Are we now seeing its mobilisation for planetary governance and its opposites: anti-sustainability movements? And if so, who defines what landscapes and ecosystems are desirable? Who bears the material burden of land transformations? How are land users and rural residents repositioned within new regimes of environmental citizenship?

We aim to critically assess whether Europe's green transformation is producing a significant shift in the historical ontology of landscape. If, as Carl O. Sauer argued, cultural landscapes emerge through the shaping of nature by human agency, what happens when landscape is increasingly shaped in anticipation of global ecological metrics and planetary thresholds? Are

we witnessing the emergence of a new landscape regime - one in which ecological function, rather than agrarian production or symbolic representation, becomes the primary organising principle?

We invite contributions that address how contemporary sustainability and governance initiatives contribute to defining new ruralities and reconfigured countrysides.

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion.

Expected outcome of the session: We hope for a broad-ranging selection of empirical papers from across Europe, supporting an inspired theoretical debate about the reconfiguring of ruralities in Europe and globally that can lead to joint publications.

Session 13. Past Forward – Learning from the Past to Address the Challenges of Today

Session organisers: Henk Baas (Cultural Heritage Agency, The Netherlands), Jan Bastiaens (Flanders Heritage Agency, Belgium), Edwin Raap, Berthe Jongejan (Cultural Heritage Agency, the Netherlands), Michiel Purmer (Natuurmonumenten, Society for Nature Conservation, The Netherlands)

Abstract: Cultural landscapes face growing climatic or spatial pressures. Policy responses often stress urgency, while the adaptive capacity of communities receives less attention. This session presents a Past Forward approach that draws on historical landscape practices to address contemporary challenges such as climate adaptation and agricultural transition. Rather than restoring the past, it integrates historical knowledge, management and elements with ecological and cultural perspectives. In this way, we will create retro-generative landscapes as an enhancement of re-generative landscapes.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Urban and rural landscapes are subject to increasing pressures. Ongoing transformations raise concerns about the adaptation capacity of local communities. The effects on social cohesion and spatial quality are widely debated. In addressing issues such as climate adaptation or agricultural transition, a strong sense of urgency often dominates policy responses, while the adaptive capacities of urban and rural societies themselves remain insufficiently acknowledged. We therefore argue for the importance of looking back and learning from how earlier generations addressed comparable challenges: how they adapted, and which spatial qualities emerged from their responses. In this approach, cultural solutions are just as essential as ecological solutions. While ecologists often think in terms of nature-based solutions, we argue that these approaches are also culturally loaded. The past offers valuable perspectives on how we can enable our society to function in harmony with nature. The idea of a Past Forward strategy does not aim to restore past conditions, but strives to incorporate and use historical knowledge, practices, management and elements of the historic landscape to contribute to a sustainable living environment. By learning from the past, it seeks an appropriate scale that resonates with both the landscape and the communities inhabiting it. We are interested in scientific research into historical and traditional uses of the living landscapes and in how these insights can be translated into contemporary practice. For instance, what can historical water systems learn us about embedding climate adaptation in present-day landscapes? Similarly, in the search for more nature-inclusive forms of agriculture, past farming practices may offer valuable guidance — but how can this knowledge be translated into current policy instruments? Are there examples of tools for the practical management of for instance nature reserves? Finally, we explicitly draw attention to researchers who explore the relationships between landscape change and art. Knowledge about human engagement with the landscape can be derived from archaeological, historical, or oral research, but may also be embedded in artworks such as paintings and sculptures. For example, the portrayed landscapes of the nineteenth century or landscape sculptures from the 1960s. What can these artworks teach us about the ways in which the landscape can be managed? Past Forward promotes a resilient and sustainable landscape that respects historical qualities, while enabling innovation and transformation, inspired by the past. In this way, we will create retro-generative landscapes as an enhancement of re-generative landscapes. We invite colleagues to share cases from research on past landscapes and reflect on dilemmas such as local ownership and participation, conflicting interests over special-use values and the role of visual culture in understanding past landscapes and contemporary challenges.

Session format: Oral and poster presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: We are considering a Special Issue in the Journal of European Landscapes or in the Dutch Journal for Historical Geography.

Session 14. Reconciling challenges: The case of the Nature Restoration Regulation

Session organisers: Theo van der Sluis (WENR, The Netherlands), Anne Schmidt (WENR, The Netherlands)

Abstract: *(Session description will be available soon)*

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: The closing round table with policy makers, practitioners, and landscape researchers will bring the findings and discussions to a higher level. We are considering a Special Issue in Landscape Ecology.

Session 15. Reconciling Sacrifice Zones: Landscapes of Harm, Inequality, and Responsibility

Session organisers: Anu Printsman (Tallinn University, Estonia)

Abstract: This session explores sacrifice zones as cultural landscapes shaped by environmental degradation, pollution, and unequal exposure to harm. Drawing on human rights, environmental justice, and landscape research, it examines lived experiences of illness, stigma, and slow violence, as well as questions of responsibility, care, and repair. The session invites critical reflection on how such landscapes are governed, remembered, and reimagined in the context of climate action and green transition.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Across Europe and beyond, certain landscapes have been exposed to environmental degradation, pollution, and health risks in the name of economic growth or national interest. Increasingly referred to as sacrifice zones, these areas are not accidental wastelands but politically produced landscapes in which harm is normalised and unevenly distributed across populations and generations. The United Nations Human Rights Council has highlighted that many sacrifice zones are disproportionately located in low-income, Indigenous, ethnic minority, or otherwise marginalised communities, where environmental harm results in serious violations of human rights, including the rights to health, life, water, food, housing, and a healthy environment. This session proposes to examine sacrifice zones as cultural landscapes shaped by histories of extraction, manufacturing, energy production, heavy infrastructure, pollution, and neglect, and by ongoing struggles over recognition, responsibility, and repair. Rather than focusing solely on material damage, the session emphasises lived experience: illness, mental health impacts, uncertainty, stigma, and the slow violence embedded in everyday life in these landscapes. Sacrifice zones challenge dominant landscape and heritage frameworks by foregrounding toxicity, vulnerability, and injustice as constitutive elements of place. In the context of climate action, energy transition, and environmental policy, sacrifice zones raise urgent questions about continuity and change. As Europe accelerates decarbonisation and resource extraction for “green” technologies, are the logics of sacrifice being dismantled—or reconfigured and displaced? How are responsibilities for past and ongoing harm acknowledged, governed, or denied? Can sacrifice zones be approached as forms of difficult heritage, requiring care, remediation, and remembrance rather than erasure? The session is open to contributions addressing:

- Sacrifice zones as cultural, environmental, or industrial landscapes;
- Health, mental health, and embodied experience of environmental harm;
- Environmental justice, human rights, and landscape governance;
- Memory, stigma, and narratives of damaged places;
- Remediation, care, and possibilities for more just landscape futures. By bringing sacrifice zones into European landscape research, this session invites critical reflection on how landscapes of harm are produced, lived, remembered, and transformed—and on how responsibility and care might reshape their futures.

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A.

Session 16. Research and Actions for Quality Nightscapes

Session organisers: Julien Wynants (University of Liège, Belgium), Serge Schmitz (University of Liège, Belgium), Emmanuel JEHIN (Université de Liège, Belgium)

Abstract: In a context of global territorial change, infrastructures tied to nighttime lighting affect landscapes visually and qualitatively. These infrastructures degrade the quality of the diurnal and nocturnal landscape. Although essential for human activities, lighting can also constitute a source of disturbance for citizens. Furthermore, the light footprint fragments the nighttime environment, thereby reducing habitat connectivity for biodiversity. This emerging field of study offers an innovative perspective on anthropogenic impacts on the landscape and on emerging opportunities for tourism.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

The day–night cycle regulates the activity periods of living organisms, whether diurnal or nocturnal. Humans are a diurnal species and have therefore long sought to render darkness visible, in order to see and to be seen. Today, the use of artificial lights has expanded to encompass nearly all human activities, enabling a partial detachment from natural cycles and leading to a structural transformation of the landscape. These profound changes affect both diurnal and nocturnal landscapes. Artificial light at night (ALAN) has thus become both a symbol of urbanisation and the primary driver of nocturnal pollution. The consequences for humans are manifold, including sleep disturbances, increased energy and temporal costs, and the degradation of the night sky. Biodiversity is also affected in a global manner, through both alterations in species behaviour and the degradation of nocturnal habitats. By fragmenting the landscape, ALAN constitutes an anthropogenic pressure that can be integrated into ecological networks to better account for their temporal dynamics. The recent emergence of dark infrastructures further highlights the growing importance of this issue, as well as the development of tourist destinations based on the quality of the darkness. Contributions may take the form of empirical research, methodological developments, conceptual reflections or experience-based case studies, at the scale of sites, cities or landscapes. The themes sought include:

- Methods and tools for analysing the spatial extent of artificial lighting in urban and peri-urban environments, based on field measurements, satellite imagery, drone data or other sources.
- The integration of nocturnal ecological issues into spatial planning policies, and the valorisation of the night sky and nightscape through recreational uses and quality-of-life considerations. How do citizens and stakeholders perceive both nocturnal and diurnal landscapes?
- The operational development of dark infrastructures and their integration into ecological networks.

Session format: Oral and poster presentations with Q&A and closing discussion.

Session 17. Rural Landscape Entangled: Decolonial Perspectives, Praxis, and Cross-cultural Local Knowledge in Europe and Beyond

Session organisers: Marilena Mela (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands), Joseph Sony Jean (KITLV/Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies, The Netherlands), David Koren (ICOMOS Netherlands, The Netherlands)

Abstract: Rural landscape entangled centres hybrid, travelling, migrant, or comparative perspectives in the study of landscapes, problematising the European landscape as spatial territory and as a field of research. This session invites contributions on the entanglement of landscapes in Europe and beyond within colonialism, extractive violence and resistance, but also migration, diaspora, and indirect legacies, including the effects of environmental issues and climate change. It asks: what is the hybrid “local” knowledge created therein, and what is its role against challenges facing landscapes today?

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Centring entanglement, movement, migration, and hybridity, this session focuses on the various “meetings” of landscapes in Europe and beyond: landscapes shaped by legacies of colonialism, extraction, and resistance, as well as by migration, trade, religious expansion, power asymmetries, and cultural exchange. Examples may include new approaches and methodologies that critically address colonial landscapes; landscape transformation; landscapes of migration; the implementation of European spatial designs “elsewhere”; landscapes of Indigenous resistance; exchanges of ecological knowledge; and landscapes of contested identities. The situated nature of landscape research, long established in disciplines such as landscape archaeology, cultural geography, and landscape architecture, has recently been taken up by emerging fields such as environmental humanities. These newer approaches emphasise landscapes as sites of multiple lifeworlds and cross-cultural, human–nonhuman coexistence. While landscape entanglement, material transfer (Hutton 2020), colonialism and resistance (Slyter 2001), and archipelagic perspectives (Olwig 2025, Mela 2025), have been examined in earlier scholarships, they are less explicitly brought into sustained dialogue with decolonial and critical environmental perspectives. By foregrounding a decolonial approach alongside a hybrid local knowledge perspective to the discussion of landscape, this session moves beyond dichotomies of local versus migrant and exogenous versus endogenous processes. This session aims to critically address power dynamics and injustice while also recognising the potential of inherently hybrid local knowledge for environmental adaptation, stewardship, and the articulation of new socioenvironmental imaginaries. We invite contributions from scholars and practitioners in landscape studies, landscape architecture, art, history, archaeology and heritage studies, geography, and related fields. Contributions may focus on landscapes located in Europe or beyond, and must be examined through perspectives of entanglement, cross-regional power relations, and/or cross-cultural exchange. The session aims to foster critical perspectives on studying landscapes across geographies. Furthermore, it explores the diffusion, transformation, and political potential of the concept of landscape itself amid ongoing decolonisation and the climate crisis.

Session format: The session's topic links to the open call “Beyond European Landscapes,” Special Issue of the Journal of European Landscapes (paper submission by November 2026). The accepted session abstracts will be invited (prior to the conference) to submit full papers to the Special Issue.

Session 18. Symbiotic Rural Landscapes: Indigenous Values and Nature-Based Solutions in Ageing Regions

Session organisers: Yuanming Xing (Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand), Yuwei Lu, Xiaoya Liu, Bruno Marques, Jacqueline McIntosh

Abstract: *(Session description will be available soon)*

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: Potential for a joint publication or Special Issue centred on "Designing for Symbiosis" in rural, post-colonial, and ageing contexts.

Session 19. Tipping Points in Changing Landscapes and Societies

Session organisers: Isabel Loupa-Ramos (Lisbon University, Portugal), Fatima Bernardo (University of Évora, Portugal), Tiago Dionisio (Gent University, Belgium), Seppe De Wit (Gent University, Belgium), Jorre Herpels (Gent University, Belgium), Veerle Van Eetvelde (Gent University, Belgium)

Abstract: *(Session description will be available soon)*

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: xxx

Session 20. Understanding Wetland Transformations through Ecological, Social, and Rural Dynamics

Session organisers: Géant Chuma Basimine (University of Liège, Belgium), Serge Schmitz (University of Liège, Belgium), Sébastien Eiter (Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research, Norway), Marcin Wójcik (University of Lodz, Poland)

Abstract: Wetlands are dynamic landscapes shaped by ecological, social, and land-use interactions. This session explores their transformations over the last century, driven by climate change, demographic dynamics, agricultural intensification, and weak governance. It examines degradation and restoration processes, ecosystem services, and strategies to reconcile ecological, social, and rural demands. Contributions across all wetland types, including marshes, ponds, peatlands, swamps, and other Ramsar-recognised ecosystems, are welcome.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Wetlands are key components of rural landscapes, combining high ecological value with significant socio-economic importance. They provide essential ecosystem services, including water regulation, flood control, drought mitigation, carbon storage, and biodiversity conservation. Wetlands are also rich in natural resources that support rural livelihoods. Historically shaped by agrarian systems and demographic patterns, wetlands are currently undergoing profound transformations driven by both natural processes and, increasingly, anthropogenic pressures. Wetlands thus represent spaces where ecological, social, and rural dynamics intersect, interact, and often conflict. Understanding these interactions is essential for addressing landscape imbalance, environmental degradation, and social inequality. This session addresses the conference theme by focusing on how wetland transformations can be understood through an integrated landscape perspective that reconciles ecological processes, social practices, and rural development trajectories. It aims to move beyond sectoral or purely biophysical approaches by examining wetlands as socio-ecological systems embedded within broader rural and urban–rural contexts. The objective is to foster open and inclusive debate on wetlands of all types, bringing together diverse perspectives and disciplinary approaches. Specifically, this session: (i) analyse the drivers of wetland transformations, including climate change, land-use practices, demographic dynamics, and public policies; (ii) assess the ecological and social impacts of these transformations on biodiversity, ecosystem services, food security, and local livelihoods; (iii) explore processes of degradation, adaptation, resilience, and restoration across different rural and peri-urban contexts; (iv) discuss management, restoration, and adaptation strategies that enhance wetland resilience; (v) foster interdisciplinary dialogue among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers on the future trajectories of wetlands within rural landscapes.

Session format: Oral and poster presentations with a closing debate.

Session 21. Water Wars or Conviviality? Futuring Peatlands by Reconciling Water, Soil, and Life

Session organisers: Anne-Katrin Broocks (University of Vechta, Germany), Fiona Hasenbach (University of Vechta, Germany), Gesa Weidemann (University of Vechta, Germany)

Abstract: Peatlands and humans have been intertwined for millennia, shaped by livelihoods, culture, and symbolic meanings. Over the past 250 years, “water wars” – drainage, peat commercialisation, and agricultural conversion – fragmented peat bodies and left lasting hydrological and socioecological imprints. While historically justified as progress, the benefits and burdens were unevenly distributed. This session explores transformative, justice-oriented pathways toward peatland futures beyond re-wetting, reconciling water, soil, and life across ecological, social, political, and more-than-human relations.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

For centuries, Europe’s peatlands have been shaped by human interventions (Dawdy, 2021). Since the 18th century, systematic “water wars” (Blackbourn, 2006) drained, commercialised, and transformed wetlands for agriculture, risk control and settlement. These interventions inscribed power into the land: deep ploughing and parallel drainage ditches fragmented peat bodies, altered hydrological cycles, and left linear scars that testify to whose labour carried out these changes. The impacts were justified with the promise of productivity, health, and prosperity. Today, about 25 % of Europe’s peatlands and 50 % in the EU have been altered (Tanneberger et al., 2021). Many now serve primarily human interests—recreation, nature conservation, climate adaptation, or economic use—revealing a fragile peace in which powerful human actors shape who benefits and who bears the costs. While the environmental consequences of peatland drainage are well documented, the role of legal and policy frameworks is often overlooked. Governance instruments, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), spatial planning regulations, water management regimes and nature conservation laws frequently continue to incentivise or normalise drained conditions, reinforcing path dependencies (Buschmann, 2020; Wichmann & Nordt, 2024). But climate change, with droughts and altered rainfall, now makes these tensions more visible and opens opportunities for transformation. This raises urgent questions: What would a (multispecies) just peatland transformation look like? How can conflicts be transformed collaboratively? How might responses move beyond technocratic fixes toward holistic regeneration reconnecting humans with water and soil? What alternative futures and decolonial approaches may guide these transitions? This session invites contributions exploring how water, soils and life in peatlands can be reconciled—not only ecologically, but socially, politically, and across multispecies relations. We welcome work on conflicts, contested governance, innovative management, and alternative futures, including practices of conviviality, healing, and renewed relationalities for peatlands. We are especially interested in novel methodological approaches, particularly co-creation.

Session format: Oral presentations with Q&A and closing discussion

Expected outcome of the session: Sustained inter- and transdisciplinary collaborations beyond the session.

Session 22. Where Cities Meet the Slope: Rethinking an Overlooked Landscape

Session organisers: Julien Wynants (University of Liège, Belgium), Serge Schmitz (University of Liège, Belgium), Martina Barcelloni (University of Liège, Belgium), Giacomo Dallatorre (University of Florence, Italy)

Abstract: Historically, the valley slope, defined as an inclined topographic surface linking higher and lower points, has been largely overlooked in spatial planning discourse. Often seen as a constraint on urbanisation, the valley slope nevertheless holds strategic potential for territorial innovation, comparable to other landscape units such as valleys or watercourses. Indeed, the valley slope functions as an interface between humans and their environment: its topographic, ecological, and social characteristics make it a complex system that can be mobilised as a subject of study in its own right.

Context, theme and objectives of the session:

Throughout history, the spatial context and its local characteristics have shaped the development of human settlement, villages and cities. The presence of essential resources, such as water, motivated the earliest forms of territorial occupation. Over time, urban forms expanded while accommodating the physical constraints of the environment. In valleys and mountainous regions, slopes pose a major technical constraint on urban sprawl. Their characteristics – gradient, orientation, length, and shape – limit development opportunities and orient spatial dynamics. Within this framework, the slope emerges as a strategic structuring element, yet one that has been relatively underexplored beyond hydrological and geomorphological considerations. Valley slopes have often been relegated to the background, hosting forms of land use that are less demanding, such as viticulture, fruit production, or even forested areas. However, these spaces provide essential connections between thalwegs and plateau summits, while maintaining potential corridors within ecological networks. Slopes are also valuable recreational environments for urban populations. It is therefore necessary to identify the strategic potential of slopes as objects of territorial innovation, and to mobilise their multiple roles as distinctive landscape units within the broader urban and valley system. Attention to slopes thus aims to position them as levers for territorial development in support of sustainable transitions. To this end, this session highlights three fundamental research questions:

- How do slopes contribute to contemporary urban and territorial dynamics?
- How has the perception of slopes evolved over time?
- How can new values and uses of valley slopes be reconciled across boundaries?

We welcome contributions exploring:

- Natural and cultural dimensions of slopes, as well as their role in territorial projects.
- The symbolism of slopes through palimpsests or iconographic analyses that reveal their meanings.
- Case studies that examine slopes as both cultural and physical entities, highlighting their potential contributions to urban development strategies.

Session format: Oral and poster presentations with Q&A and closing discussion.

Expected outcome of the session: The experiences gathered will contribute to the production of practical knowledge applicable to both urban and peri-urban contexts.