

Nature's New Urban Worlds: towards a critical geographical engagement

Call for Papers AAG 2019, April 3 – 8, Washington DC

Whilst the modernist separation of nature and the city has long been troubled within the academy, it has been resolutely upheld within policies and practices of urban development and environmental governance that have tended to focus on techno-economic fixes for urban sustainability challenges and on seeking resolution for nature's degradation beyond the city walls. Against this backdrop, the recent surge of interest in the ways in which 'nature' can be deployed as a means through which to realise urban sustainability and, in turn, tackle global challenges stands in stark relief. Through new rationalities for urban development, knowledge practices, and forms of intervention, nature is being used in the forging of new urban worlds.

First, we can witness how the idea of nature is corralled into the city through calls for cities 'think like an ecosystem' – for policy-makers and planners to adopt principles and concepts derived from eco-system sciences – in order to manage and govern urban systems, with the notion of resilience most prominent amongst them. Second, there are new efforts being made to understand how nature itself contributes to the functioning and meaning of the urban, with diverse knowledge-making practices being undertaken from assessment modelling to citizen science, where functional perspectives jostle with those derived from environmental ethics to create alternative perspectives for how we might come to recognise the value of nature in urban futures. Third, efforts to bring nature into the city are also to be found in a growing momentum behind the notion of 'nature based solutions', an umbrella term that links together forms of green and blue infrastructure, interventions to create urban green space and the renaturing of cities, as well as initiatives that seek to develop the potential of the urban as a site for food production. Nature based solutions are gaining traction through their political relevance to multiple sustainable development goals and as forms of intervention that stakeholders and communities find salient. The mobilisation of nature as a way of managing, knowing and doing urban sustainability is taking place not only through multiple interventions in cities globally, but also through the transnational organisation of urban environmental governance through the formation of new coalitions of urban, nature and finance actors raising important questions concerning how nature's new urban worlds are being delineated, enacted and governed across diverse urban conditions. Yet our understanding of how and with what consequences forms of governing, knowing and enacting urban futures through, with and for nature remains relatively unexplored.

In this session, we seek to develop a critical geographical engagement with nature's new urban worlds. We welcome papers that address one or more of the following themes:

- Ecosystems by design: how are forms of knowledge and practice derived from the natural and biophysical sciences coming to be used and deployed within urban planning, management and governance and with what effect in relation to urban sustainability goals?
- Alternative ecologies and environmental ethics: how are forms of knowledge derived from communities, practitioners, stakeholders and experts which relate to alternative ways of knowing urban nature being produced and with what consequences?
- Making nature count: how are the benefits (and negative consequences) of urban nature for sustainability goals evaluated, imagined, legitimated and contested?
- Domestic, natural or invasive: which forms of nature are seen to belong or be excluded from the city, by whom and to what purpose?
- Just natures: how and by whom are different ways of valuing nature addressing inequity and uneven development and with what implications for addressing urban sustainability?

Abstracts of 250 words should be sent to laura.m.tozer@durham.ac.uk by September 21st. We will inform participants of their inclusion in the session by October 1st and will require registration with the AAG Online and the PIN by October 15th in order to submit the session for inclusion in the AAG programme.