

Call for Papers – AAG 2022 (New York City, 25 February – 1 March 2022)

Undermining the Earth? Infrastructural challenges to sustainability

Session organizers and chairs: Mia Bennett (University of Washington), Peter Schweitzer (University of Vienna), and Olga Povoroznyuk (University of Vienna)

Sponsor groups: Polar Geography Specialty Group, Political Geography Specialty Group

Geographers and anthropologists have long demonstrated the co-production of the natural and built environment. With growing recognition of the Anthropocene, Earth scientists also acknowledge the difficulty of distinguishing the “natural” from the “built” environment, exemplified by phenomena like oceans full of plastic and flooded subways. At the same time, climate change, mass species extinction, ocean acidification, and other symptoms of the Anthropocene have led social scientists to engage with issues previously seen as the exclusive domain of natural scientists, often with a keen eye to the social, cultural and economic sustainability of individuals and communities in the face of environmental crisis.

In this session, we aim to advance interdisciplinary inquiry into the built environment by interrogating whether infrastructure supports or jeopardizes the potential for sustainable communities. We conceptualize sustainability broadly, referring to not only physical, demographic and socio-economic indicators, but also cultural vitality, well-being, and quality of life. By connecting social studies of infrastructure to critiques of sustainability, we hope to knit together work on both the material and immaterial dimensions of the built environment, bringing together theories of affordance and affect, among others, and linking geographical and anthropological perspectives within research on these topics.

We are particularly inspired by Tim Ingold’s “dwelling perspective,” which lays a possible foundation for an anthropology of the built environment. Ingold observes that humans are distinct in their capacity to build, for we do not just inhabit the world around us, but rather give rise to its materiality, too. The structures we erect and the ideologies they manifest can shape our worldviews as well (Humphrey, 2005; Buchli, 2020). Infrastructure like highways, railways, and skyscrapers can also generate path dependencies that constrain our ability to imagine, let alone build, alternative worlds.

While the session organizers work primarily in remote Arctic communities, we are broadly interested in critiques of infrastructure and sustainability. We welcome papers that engage with infrastructure and its ability to bolster and/or undermine ecological and social foundations at a range of scales. Relevant topics include, but are not limited, to:

- Building, maintaining, and repairing infrastructure in the face of climate crisis
- Indigenous infrastructures and approaches to climate change mitigation
- Ethnographies of the built environment
- Infrastructure and climate change, risk, and resilience
- Critiques of sustainability

Please send your abstract of no more than 250 words to miabenn@uw.edu, olga.povoroznyuk@univie.ac.at, and peter.schweitzer@univie.ac.at by 16 October 2021. Accepted presenters will be notified by 18 October, in time to meet the paper abstract submission deadline of 19 October 2021.

Special issue

Session presenters will be invited to contribute their papers to a special issue the organizers are planning.

References

Buchli, V. (2020). *An Anthropology of Architecture*. London: Routledge.

Humphrey, C. (2005). Ideology in infrastructure: architecture and Soviet imagination. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 11(1), 39-58.

Ingold, T. (2000). *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*. London & New York: Routledge.



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