

ESPPRIT @ RSA Winter Conference 2024, Session Wrap-Up

Promoting Justice for Eco-social Transformations in Urban and Regional Development: Perspectives from Theory and Practice

The recent ESPPRIT special session at the RSA Winter Conference 2024 on justice at the intersection of social innovation, practice, and public policy, included three insightful presentations exploring the role of the state, environmental politics and conceptual understandings for socio-ecological transformations, setting the tone for the network's further engagement.

Astrid Krisch and **Lucas Barning** opened the session with an overview of the ESPPRIT network's missions and emphasised its central objectives, including:

- understanding local stabilised injustices in existing policies and practices (past; path-dependencies)
- analysing the role of place-based social innovations and policies in addressing regional disparities (conjunctures; strategies)
- understanding how social innovation and eco-social policies can contribute to better cope with newly emerging eco-social risks (anticipation)

Dominik Gager (Darmstadt University of Applied Sciences, Germany) explored strategies for staying within planetary boundaries by drawing on lessons from wartime economies of scarcity. He introduced the notion of "ecological austerity," emphasising the disproportionate burden transformative processes often place on vulnerable populations. The concept of wartime economies was referenced as a potential framework for rapid and comprehensive systemic change, drawing parallels with historical examples of centralised planning and provisioning. A key debate emerged around the role of planning, contrasting state-led approaches with participatory, communicative planning frameworks.

Richard Bärnthaler (University of Leeds, UK) challenged dominant narratives in environmental politics, critiquing the prevalence of a nature-society dualism and elitist frameworks that drive socio-ecological change. He proposed reframing "sufficiency" as a social organising principle, moving away from individual sacrifices to collective gains that prioritise justice and equity. His argument challenged the traditional co-benefits narrative, advocating for social justice to take precedence over ecological goals. Discussions highlighted the need for clear mechanisms and indicators to evaluate transformative change, as well as the importance of aligning ecological benefits with social equity.

Richard Crisp (Sheffield Hallam University, UK) unpacked the "eco-social growth trilemma" in policies and practice of alternative approaches to economic development, showcasing local-level strategies to navigate this complex challenge. He presented a typology of synergies, trade-offs, hierarchies, and integrations among ecological, social, and economic goals, emphasising the role of governance and multi-level interactions. His insights underscored the diversity of development strategies and the importance of understanding local variations and institutional dynamics.

Following the presentations, interactive group discussions among the audience sparked debates around the role of democratic and spatial planning in driving transformative change, identifying strategies to reframe socio-ecological discourses, the interplay of local and national governance, and the political traction of alternative economic models. Challenges in evaluating the impact of transformative initiatives were raised, emphasising the need for robust frameworks and reflective practices. The session concluded with recognition of the broad and thought-provoking nature of the discussions, with a commitment to refining and focusing future engagements to deepen the exploration of these critical issues.

The session's collaborative energy set an inspiring foundation for the next ESPPRIT meeting in Oxford on 18-19 June 2025 on "The geography of alternative development policy and practice for eco-social transformations"! Look out for the call for contributions here: www.GCHU.org.uk/ESPPRIT



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