

SESSION DESCRIPTION

ID: T20d

Green Gentrification: Critical Perspectives on Ecosystem Services Justice

Hosts:

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Abstract:

Gentrification has been studied for over 60 years. Ecological or green gentrification has gained attention since the mid-2000s due to its link to environmental injustices. As demand for green areas grows worldwide, investments in ecosystem restoration, urban greening, and climate adaptation increase, aligned with sustainability strategies. However, research shows these efforts can reinforce inequalities across distributional, procedural, and recognitional dimensions. Green gentrification connects ecological improvements with land markets and regulation, leading to displacement, exclusion, and profit. These processes impact inner cities, peri-urban areas, rural landscapes, and regional areas amidst planetary urbanisation. Methods for assessing ecosystem services are not neutral; they shape which benefits are visible and valued, varying with different approaches, making methodological awareness vital in green gentrification.

This session aims to explore how ecosystem services (ES) science can enrich, and eventually transform, the concept of green gentrification. While earlier discussions emphasised visible urban green spaces, such as parks and waterfronts, ES approaches measure and value the manifold benefits that society receives from well-functioning ecosystems—such as carbon sequestration, water regulation, and scenic landscapes—often through valuation schemes that express such contributions in monetary terms. This introduces new perspectives on understanding the exchange and use value of land and advocates for expanding the concept of the “rent gap”, as green gentrification enables developers, investors, and conservationists to capture ES values, leading to the emergence of a “green rent gap”.

These processes prompt important critiques: ES commodification may mask relational and cultural values, favour actors with technical or financial capacities, and justify the displacement or exclusion of less favoured actors using sustainability rhetoric. By examining how ES valuations alter the dynamics of accumulation and dispossession (especially in urban, peri-urban, and rural settings), this session emphasises the political economy of “green rents” and the impacts on environmental justice. It highlights the need to reassess distributional, procedural, and recognitional dimensions.

We welcome contributions that critically examine the political economy of green transformations. We are interested in contributions that:

1. Interrogate the green rent gap dynamics of ecological improvements: showing how ecosystem restoration, climate adaptation, and greening projects produce or widen rent gaps in both urban and regional contexts.

2. Critically assess ecosystem services (ES) valuation approaches: examining how various methods (monetary, intrinsic, relational, or assemblage-based) reveal complementary aspects of green gentrification.
3. Document social consequences of green gentrification: tracing processes of displacement, exclusion, and dispossession, while highlighting distributional, procedural, and recognitional injustices.
4. Bring comparative and cross-scalar perspectives: from different geographical locations, and across inner-city, peri-urban, and rural/landscape contexts of extended urbanisation.
5. Explore alternatives and counter-narratives: investigating governance arrangements, grassroots mobilisations, or policy frameworks that resist commodification and seek more just ecological futures.
6. Analyse the role of stakeholders: in either promoting or preventing green gentrification by examining their interests, values, and actions that influence the conditions for engaging in green gentrification and environmental justice.

Contributions must clearly and substantially demonstrate the links to ES science, either conceptually or operationally.

This session aims to produce a coherent body of publishable research for a special issue on green gentrification in the Ecosystem Services journal (IF 6,6 – Q1).

Goals and objectives of the session:

1. Advance critical debates on green gentrification by integrating ecosystem services (ES) science with urban political economy and environmental justice perspectives.
2. Reframe the rent gap in light of ecological valuation, showing how ES can both reveal and reshape mechanisms of accumulation, dispossession, and spatial exclusion.
3. Bridge conceptual and empirical work across different geographies and scales — from inner-city greening to peri-urban and rural landscapes under extended urbanisation.
4. Foster interdisciplinary dialogue among scholars of urban studies, political ecology, ecological economics, and planning, to enrich the analytical toolkit for studying green transformations.
5. Generate publishable outputs that consolidate this emerging research field, aiming toward a special issue or collaborative publication on ES and green gentrification.

Planned output / Deliverables:

1. Special Issue proposal in a high-impact journal (e.g. Ecosystem Services), consolidating the session's contributions into a coherent body of publishable research on green gentrification and ES.
2. Research network building: to establish an international working group on Environmental Justice, Ecosystem Services, and Green Gentrification to foster collaboration beyond the conference.
3. Policy-oriented output: to collectively produce a short position paper or commentary targeted at urban planners, environmental NGOs, and policymakers to highlight the risks of ES commodification and promote just ecological futures.

Session format:

1. Introduction by the convenors (5 minutes) to frame the aims of the session.
2. Paper presentations (4–5 papers, 12 minutes each)
3. Discussant commentary (10 minutes) to synthesize key insights, highlight theoretical connections and open pathways for debate.
4. Open Q&A and plenary discussion (20 minutes) to foster critical dialogue among presenters, discussant(s), and the audience.

We believe this format ensures a balanced allocation of time for in-depth presentations and interactive exchange. If scheduling permits, we are open to a double session (two linked slots) to expand the number of contributions and deepen comparative perspectives.

Voluntary contributions accepted:

Yes, I allow any abstract to be submitted to my session for review

Related to ESP Working Group:

TWG 20 - Equity in ES research