

Call for Papers 31st IRNOP 2026

June 2-5, 2026 at Delft University of Technology

Hopeful projects in response to radical uncertainty

The role of projects contributing to a sustainable future increasingly dominates societal and research agenda's (Geels & Locatelli, 2024; Huemann & Silviu, 2017; Ninan et al., 2025). Scholars acknowledge that contributing to a sustainable future through projects is challenging due to difficulties in sharing learnings from these projects (Eikelenboom & van Marrewijk, 2024), in upscaling innovations to large-scale use (Borghei & Magnusson, 2018), and in navigating uncertainty (Perminova et al., 2008).

Projects contributing to future visions such as decarbonisation, Net Zero and digital transformation are situated in a world of radical uncertainty in which geopolitical, economical, societal, anthropogenic and environmental events can disrupt their planning and execution. In such a context, our understanding of the present and knowledge of underlying processes of the future are imperfect, while processes are constantly changing (King & Kay, 2020). Risk-based perspectives (f.e. Perminova et al., 2008) do not provide sufficient ways to deal with radical, or deep uncertainty, which entails the impossibility of fully knowing possible outcomes or their likelihood beforehand (Scoones, 2024). Our understanding of navigating radical uncertainty in contributing to future visions is limited.

Projects navigating radical uncertainty need attention to existential domains and “deep meaning” that guide practices (Stacey, 2024). Hope is a powerful potential response to create deep meaning, to come to terms with radical uncertainty and to commit to realizing needed change (Ojala, 2017). Hope is a positive motivational state that contributes to project actors expending the requisite energy necessary to pursue and attain project goals (Helland & Winston, 2005). Ojala (2017) shows hope is a multifaceted concept consisting of emotional, cognitive, and action components. In line with this, Feuls et al. (2025) identified mechanisms which enable actors to follow paths as sustained courses of action in a sustainability strategy.

This hopeful understanding of projects contributing to a future visions is interesting to project studies. We need hopeful projects to overcome a pessimistic views considering the future as a deviation from a glorious past or optimistic views, believing that issues will be solved in the future (Hasselaar, 2020). Vanguard projects are examples of hopeful projects. Vanguard projects are conceptualized as niches where innovations can develop and, ultimately, transform their institutional environment (Gasparro et al., 2022; Papadonikolaki et al., 2023). Actors can thus experiment with innovative technology, new behavior and new identities needed for contributing to sustainable futures.

Against this background, questions that can be addressed within the scope of this conference are:

- How can hopeful projects be helpful in navigating uncertainty?
- How do projects create deep meaning to contribute to sustainability transition?
- How do vanguard projects hopeful projects navigate radical uncertainty?
- How do hopeful projects differ from other projects?
- How do project actors experiment with innovative technology contributing to sustainable futures?
- How do project actors experiment with new (collaborative) behavior to support the transition to sustainable futures?
- How do project actors reflect upon new identities needed for sustainable futures?
- How can we study hopeful projects?
- Are there specific research methodologies that are needed to study hopeful projects?

- How can action research contribute to the effectiveness of projects in creating a sustainable future?
- How can digitalization of and by projects contribute to sustainable futures?

Submissions

The IRNOP 2026 conference is hosted by the Delft University of Technology, June 2-5, 2026. We welcome both papers and panel proposals.

Papers: Full papers, not exceeding 8000 words, excluding references. Submissions may build on qualitative or quantitative data or may be conceptual in nature. It is important that the paper is set in the context of current research and shows that the work is original. Tables and figures should appear in the text and numbered consecutively with their appearance. Style for references APA 5th.

Panel proposals: A panel is a session where a number (3-5) people discuss a certain topic under the direction of a moderator and in front of an audience. There is room for suggestions on the format with interactions and presentations, but ideally cover a topic that makes sense to the community and/or to the theme of the conference. A panel proposal should be maximum 200 words and outline the rationale for the topic.

How to submit your paper

- Submit your full paper in one anonymized PDF-format file on-line on the IRNOP 2026 submission system. <https://www.ironop26.org/166776/home> .
- The paper must be your own original work, not published elsewhere. If you submit a paper, you also agree to review at least two papers for IRNOP 2026.
- Papers will be blind peer reviewed by at least two reviewers. Hence, make sure not to include any authors identifying information in the document or file properties. Author information is to be included only in the submission form.
- Submitted and accepted papers will be available in e-format accessible for registered IRNOP 2026 delegates only. There will be no conference proceedings.
- In case of acceptance, the author, or at least one of the co-authors should be present at the conference to discuss the paper.
- There is no limit to how many papers you may submit or discuss.

Submission deadline for papers is **Friday, January 30, 2026, 12:00 CET**

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