

6th ESP Europe Conference

18-22 May 2026 | Prague, Czechia

SESSION DESCRIPTION

ID: X4

Getting out of our comfort zones to build soulful partnerships: exploring human–nature relations for a people–and nature positive future

Hosts:

	Name	Organisation	E-mail
Host (s):	Martina Artmann	Weihenstephan–Triesdorf University of Applied Sciences	martina.artmann@hswt.de
Co-host(s):	Jessica Hemingway	Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development	j.hemingway@ioer.de
	Susanne Boerner	University of Birmingham	s.borner@bham.ac.uk

Abstract:

In times of accelerating ecological and social crises, the concept of ecosystem services often risks being framed in purely instrumental, human-centered terms. This is a risk, as this approach is also less likely to garner broader support for such measures. Based on our experience, there is an urgent need for approaches that recognize nature as a partner, kin, and co-creator of thriving futures (i.e., humans working together with nature). This interactive session explores how pluralistic values, inner transformations, and soulful connections can enrich the discourse on ecosystem services, contributing to people– and nature–positive futures.

Drawing on our journey of engaging with posthuman city visions (i.e., urban acupuncture, urban human–nature resonance, buen vivir), Indigenous and ecocentric worldviews, and practices of human–nature partnership, we will share our personal and professional story that illustrates both the challenges and the transformative potential of rethinking human–nature relations. Participants will then be invited into an experiential, embodied human–nature partnership practice —through meditation and ritual-inspired exercises, such as stone reading—to approach nature as soulful kin. The session continues with a creative reflection, where participants express their experiences through journaling, poetry, or drawing. We will conclude by jointly reflecting on the implications of these experiences for the scientific and policy-oriented discourse on ecosystem services, and how to integrate inner and outer transformations into the pathway toward a people– and nature–positive future.

Goals and objectives of the session:

- To bring experiential and relational dimensions into the ecosystem services discourse.
- To explore how Indigenous, ecocentric, and posthuman perspectives can inform people– and nature–positive futures in cities and beyond.
- To engage participants in embodied and creative practices that foster relational capacities with nature.
- To generate ideas on how to integrate inner transformations and soulful partnerships into ecosystem services research, practice, and education.
- To identify actionable steps for advancing the ecosystem services community’s engagement with values, worldviews, and practices that honor nature as partner and kin.

Planned output / Deliverables:

- A collective set of creative reflections (texts, drawings, poems) produced during the session. These could be shared digitally with participants and the ESP community.

- A synthesis of key insights and to-do's for integrating soulful and relational approaches into the ecosystem services discourse.
- Potential basis for a joint commentary or practice note in an ecosystem services-related outlet (depending on participants' interest).
- Strengthened network building among participants by connecting researchers, practitioners, and creatives interested in integrating inner transformation and human-nature partnerships into the ecosystem services community.

Session format:

Format: Interactive session blending storytelling, experiential practice, creative reflection, and group dialogue.

1. Opening Story (10 min): Personal and professional journey toward posthuman cities, Indigenous and ecocentric worldviews, and human-nature partnerships.
2. Experiential Practice (45 min): Guided meditation and ritual-inspired exercise (e.g., stone reading) to invite participants into relating with nature as soulful kin.
3. Creative Reflection (15 min): Participants express their experiences through journaling, poetry, or drawing.
4. Sharing Circle & Synthesis (20 min): Collective reflection on insights, linked back to ecosystem services discourse and implications for a people- and nature-positive future.

Estimated duration: 90 minutes.

For this session, no submission of abstracts is required.

Voluntary contributions accepted:

No, I only want to include abstracts from my own invited speakers

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