

## Abstracts for Panel 1: Ethnography at the intersection between infrastructures and environments

### **Conveners**

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### **Panel abstract:**

As metaphor and object alike, infrastructure invokes a plurality of parts hanging together to form a larger relational assemblage. The term also expresses depth, meaning that infrastructures are the structural conditions of possibility for second-order processes; they are the grounds for emergent figures. Yet, this vertical imaginary is increasingly destabilized by ethnographic findings that complicate separations between the infrastructural and environmental. As Kregg Hetherington (2019: 6) has suggested, “such a distinction no longer works when it is our infrastructures of global transportation and consumption that produce the anthropocenic environment on which infrastructures are built.” Infrastructure’s connotation of depth is also at stake in recent scholarship on environmental infrastructures. The infrastructural and environmental become difficult to hold apart when infrastructures turn out to enfold and become subject to modification by such diverse entities as spirits (Ishii 2017), oysters (Wakefield 2020), and rice (Morita 2017). But infrastructures unsettle and recombine not only naturecultures. As ethnographers, we are dependent on academic and various other kinds of infrastructure. At once method, object of study, and sense-making device, infrastructures thus also reanimate classic questions around reflexivity and the relation between the empirical and conceptual.

We invite papers that inquire into the infrastructure-environment nexus in any field or form. How does the anthropology of infrastructure serve to investigate contemporary environmental relations, care, and politics? How might ethnography at the intersection between the infrastructural and environmental work as a fertile ground for revisiting and re-describing classic anthropological concepts and tropes?

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### Abstract: Proshant Chakraborty

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**Paper title:** Matter, materiality, and more-than-human agency: Caring for Mumbai’s suburban railway trains

#### **Abstract:**

Mumbai’s suburban railway network is one of the most densely-packed and widely-used public transport infrastructures in the world. These trains, colloquially known as “Mumbai locals,” carry around 8 million commuters every day, and also contend with the city’s unruly but vibrant coastal ecology, such as rainfall and flooding during the annual monsoon season. Drawing on ethnographic work at a railway car shed, this presentation explores the ways that engineers and workers secure trains from the harmful entanglements that arise between human and nonhuman matter, particularly dust, water, and crowd. Water and dust, for instance, saturate Mumbai’s humid and continuously under-construction environment, especially atmospheric air that is used in several vital train functions like braking and cooling. Crowds, too, are an indispensable facet of urban commuting, where the sheer density of millions of bodies crushed against each other exert tremendous pressure against trains. The entangled and cumulative effects of water, dust, and crowd compromise and threaten several important technical functions, and thus require constant care and attention from railway engineers. However, as these forms of matter cannot be eliminated but only be managed within a threshold (Marder 2016), I explore how engineers attend to the specific material properties of such matter, which can both reparative and damaging. In doing so, I argue that the relative “success” of securing trains illustrates how care for infrastructure both involves and engenders more-than-human agency (e.g., Bakker & Bridge 2006; Barad 2003; Bennett 2010; Law & Mol 1995).

[Abstract: Martin Edström](#)

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**Paper title:** Bugs at the intersection of environmental care, politics, and values surrounding food.

**Abstract:**

The effects of climate change is of rising concern, and the world's growing population continually increases the demand for sustainable sources of food in order to improve global food security. In 2013, the FAO published a report which advocated for the idea that increased human consumption of insects could be a potential solution, as the production of farmed insects has a greatly reduced environmental cost when compared to other alternatives such as beef, pork, poultry, and fish (Huis and the FAO 2013). Whilst insects are a staple ingredient in the diets of over two billion people across the world, the prospect of eating insects is met with scorn by many in Europe, North America, and Australasia. In the last decade, a number of actors in Sweden have tried to increase awareness about insects as human food, as well as establish an industry for insect-based food products. This work has been without much success. In this paper, I will explore some of the politics and socio-cultural aspects that have impeded these actors' endeavor to propagate insects as a potential future food. What will be discussed is how new ways of caring for the environment are positioned at the intersection of existing structural conditions which regulate their potential success.

[Abstract: Corinna Kruse](#)

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**Paper title:** Infrastructure As a Figure of Thought

**Abstract:**

Infrastructures undergird the movement of people, goods, and ideas. This presentation takes infrastructures not literally but as a figure of thought to think with about the movement of knowledge, in particular the movement of forensic evidence through the Swedish criminal justice system. Thinking with infrastructure about setting up, using, and maintaining an undergirding for the movement of knowledge makes it possible, I argue, to capture the work that goes on at a spatial and temporal distance from the knowledge that is to be moved. Thus, infrastructure as a figure of thought offers a widened perspective on how knowledge is moved between different communities. Conversely, the movement of knowledge may be useful for thinking about physical infrastructure, for example in terms of which and whose – perhaps invisible – work goes into facilitating the movement of people or objects.

### Abstract: Jenny Lindblad

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**Paper title:** From ecosystem services to ecosystem servicing– reorienting urban planning policy through soil practices.

#### **Abstract:**

Urban planning is undergoing an ecological turn in attempts to address climate and biodiversity crises. Ecosystem service (ES) assessments has gained influence in this turn, as a means to address environmental issues. The critique on ES stresses that these evaluations of nature's value in terms of how well an ecological phenomena serves human well-being rely on anthropocentrism and fail to acknowledge for multi-species interdependencies. In this paper, we seek to resituate the human in ES by visiting urban gardeners' work with soils. Soils, a bioinfrastructure invisible in ES assessments and approached in urban planning as an extractive resource, have proven generative for social sciences and humanities to rethink human-environment relations. Joining this line of work, we draw on our own and others' ethnographic engagements with soil practitioners. Urban soil growers define themselves and their practices in terms of servicing (rather than merely receiving) and caring for local ecosystems. These care practices are informed by a concern for the environmental challenges that we are facing on different scales and unequal terms. To learn from and find ways to recognize these practices, we try out a reconceptualization of ES from a receiving position of services towards an ecosystem caring. This implies grappling with the notion of care as accommodating ambivalent human-environment relations beyond technoscientific management of bioinfrastructures.

### Abstract: Elisa Maria López

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**Paper title:** "The People's Mining Company": Caring for Affective Infrastructures of Extraction in Kiruna, Sweden

#### **Abstract:**

This paper explores the relationship between affect, infrastructure, and resource extraction in Kiruna, Sweden's northernmost city and site of the world's largest underground iron mine. Specifically, this paper examines how affect and emotions are put to work by the Swedish-state owned mining company LKAB to maintain and repair corporate-community relations damaged by mining deformations and displacement of 6,000 Kiruna residents ongoing since 2004. The presentation and preliminary analysis of recent fieldwork in Kiruna will be two-fold. First, I show how long-established relations between LKAB and residents partially constitute an "affective infrastructure". I argue that corporate care and maintenance of this affective infrastructure has become increasingly necessary as social and material infrastructures of Kiruna residents' everyday lives are continually damaged and disrupted by mining. In conversation with scholarship from the anthropology of resource extraction (Sejersen and Thisted 2020), corporations (Rajak 2014), infrastructure, architecture, and affect (Ruiz 2021, Frichot, et. al 2022), I consider why and how these affective infrastructures are maintained. Second, I briefly consider

efforts by LKAB and the Swedish mining industry to “scale up” these affective infrastructure(s) in the context of Sweden’s “green transformation” (*grön omställning*). I argue that this scaling-up reflects corporate and state efforts to establish both a translocal affective infrastructure and “license to mine” – one grounded in “green” morality and affect (Mack 2019, Angelo 2021) – as mining industry campaigns and LKAB’s dramatic January 2023 announcement of rare earth minerals deposits seek to frame continued mining in Kiruna as critical to global climate solutions and sustainability.

Abstract: Gloria Michiels

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**Paper title:** When trees become part of green infrastructure.

**Abstract:**

Based on an ethnography of the practices of “digitalised nature”, launched in London in February 2022, I propose to reflect on our relationship to nature when it is apprehended as 'green infrastructure'. To do this, I will focus on the *i-Tree eco* project used by the British capital to determine the monetary value of its urban canopy.

Like many cities around the world, London is looking for solutions to combat global warming and its consequences. Trees are emerging as new allies in this battle. However, it is not easy to integrate or preserve them in an urban environment that is generally hostile to them. This is why some people came up with the idea of using the *i-Tree eco* software, which makes it possible to determine the monetary value of the services provided by trees, in the hope of participating in their preservation. Semi-structured interviews and several periods of fieldwork invite us to question the deep motivations and imaginaries of the different protagonists involved in this project.

Our contribution aims to reflect on our relationship with nature by questioning this process of 'valuing nature': how can we consider this integration of trees into the city's infrastructure? Does giving a monetary value to nature really contribute to its preservation? Is it possible to reconcile nature and culture?

Abstract: Chakad Ojani

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**Paper title:** Mining and/in outer space: Comparison and infrastructural mediation in subarctic Sweden

**Abstract:**

Space activities in subarctic Sweden are predicated on older infrastructures of underground resource extraction. The ongoing expansion of the country's rocket launch site, Esrange, relies on the mining

industry's construction of the Circumpolar North as resourceful and available for exploitation. However, by drawing on fieldwork in and around the city of Kiruna, I demonstrate how relations between mining and space were also invoked emically by space enthusiasts and Sámi reindeer herders: in negative terms, by herders for whom the spaceport served to hold mining companies at bay; in a positive sense, by lobbyists who described various kinds of material flows and potential synergies between the two industries; and analogically, by space actors who envisaged extraplanetary futures vis-à-vis mining and the underground. While the grounding of outer space in earthly socialities has become something of a standard trope in the social sciences and humanities, in this paper I outline an ethnographic approach that also asks about the way planetary milieux are occasionally rendered extraterrestrial-like.

Abstract: Facundo Rivarola

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**Paper title:** The “Built” and “Wild” Infrastructures of Asunción, Paraguay: (Un)Settling Urban Natures

**Abstract:**

The floodplains of Asunción, capital city of Paraguay, have been going through major infrastructural transformation. Since 2010, construction of a large-scale river front avenue and public park, bordering the city's outskirts from North to South, have been its underway. However, these areas, known as *Bañados*, were never empty floodplains. Indigenous, mestizos and rural migrant communities have lived there since colonial times, forming a historically rooted socio-ecology. Following the flooding seasons, these communities cyclically move from the city's outskirts to temporary camps in the center, and back. As mobile semi-formal settlements, they do not see flooding as entirely restricting their lives. Similarly, despite the proximity to the built urban environments and pollution, these areas are also home for migratory birds and a surprising variety of fauna and flora. The State-run redevelopment project, however, deems that floodplains are the “natural” area of the river and that the *Bañados* communities should permanently move elsewhere. This creates a temporal clash between the movement of water, people, wild animals, and cars. With the natural ponds of the south region being sand filled, estranged crabs appeared in the streets of Asunción south neighborhoods. Crabs and frogs' street fights are now more common. In the North, where construction is more advanced, car traffic is often interrupted by large yellow anacondas, mysteriously crossing their way between the city and the river. Ethnographically looking at the “built” and “natural” infrastructures of Asunción, this research explores the (im)possibilities of human and non-human collaborations through the (un)settling urban natures of Asunción.

[Abstract: A.R.E. Taylor](#)

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**Paper title:** Spaceport Cornwall: Constructing an Environmentally Responsible Space Infrastructure in South West England

**Abstract:**

This paper explores the environmental promises and tensions that have surfaced around the development of Spaceport Cornwall, a new satellite launching infrastructure based in the Southwest of England. The Spaceport utilises horizontal launch services to deploy small satellites into Low Earth Orbit. Spaceport Cornwall is significant for its foregrounding of environmental sustainability in its press releases, promising to become 'the most sustainable Spaceport in the world'. Through the development of this 'climate conscious' space infrastructure, the Spaceport aims to open up a new economic era for Cornwall, grounded not in the extractive industries of mining and fishing that shape the region's industrial past, but in visions of the region as a space hub at the forefront of innovation and climate responsibility. This paper explores different avenues through which environmental 'care' is constructed and navigated in relation to this infrastructure. In marketing material and through local community work, the Spaceport developers are keen to position the infrastructure project as an enactment of care for the local, global and space environment: by conjuring jobs, by pioneering an environmentally-friendly space sector and by engaging in space projects that will address climate change. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted with Spaceport Cornwall and with local environmental groups, as well as the analysis of government documents and marketing and media materials, this paper examines the anticipative imaginaries of sustainability and regional development that are clustering around this infrastructure, as space becomes a key place-making tool for South West England.

**Keywords:** Spaceport; Climate Change; Environmental Justice; Cornwall; Care; Infrastructure; Carbon Footprint; Greenwashing; Outer Space

[Abstract: Wågström and Michael](#)

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**Paper title:** Caring for Energy, Energy to Care: Ethnographies from India and Sweden

**Abstract:**

As the climate crisis continues to grow, there is an increasing focus both in research and policy spaces on the need and urgency of energy transitions. In this talk, we urge scholars, policymakers and social movements to recognize the ways that care work and practices of care are intersecting with everyday experiences of energy use. Through case studies from India and Sweden, we depict how care activities and energy use intertwine in people's daily lives in ways that are often deeply gendered. These two

settings serve to illustrate our argument that energy and care are and must be deeply interlinked, in two main directions: energy as enabler or disabler of care work, and care work as shaping demands on energy access. To ensure a just energy transition where care is enabled and fairly shared, care must be an inherent part of energy transition analyses.