

HUMAN GEOGRAPHY IN WALES



GREGYNOG

Postgraduate Conference

2026

Wednesday 11th March to Thursday 12th March 2026

Gregynog Hall

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What3words rider.womanly.ombudsman

Check in at Gregynog Front Hall from 1pm

Opening Session – 1.15 p.m. in Seminar Room 1

Academic Lead for the Conference:

Chris Muellerleile, Swansea University

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WELCOME TO THE GREGYNOG POSTGRADUATE CONFERENCE 2026

The annual Postgraduate Conference takes place with the support of the Wales Graduate School for the Social Sciences (WGSSS) and the Universities of Aberystwyth, Cardiff and Swansea. It constitutes part of the Advanced Research Skills Training for the Place, Environment and Development Cluster of the WGSSS, and this conference is particularly related to postgraduate research in Human Geography. We are very grateful to everyone who works at the Hall for ensuring that our annual Conference is a wonderful experience.

DELEGATES ATTENDING THE CONFERENCE

Postgraduate Researchers in Attendance

Name	email	Institution
Blue Bell	blueobell@outlook.com	Aberystwyth University
Tatiana Bodnar	2334170@swansea.ac.uk	Swansea University
Sarah Bowen	slb35@aber.ac.uk	Aberystwyth University
Molly Cranch	2112979@swansea.ac.uk	Swansea University
Finlay John Crawford	crawfordfj@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Robert Cole	s4323191@glos.ac.uk	University of Gloucestershire
Rachel England	2227098@swansea.ac.uk	Swansea University
Rebecca Funnell	rbf25prq@bangor.ac.uk	Bangor University
Jill Gettrup	gettrupja@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Sanjeev Kumar	kumars19@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Eugene Rourke	rourkeej1@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Nirushan Sudarsan	sudarsann@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Chloe Thompson	chloeahthompson@gmail.com	University of Gloucestershire
Melissa Turgut	turgutm@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Kirsty Usher	kiu@aber.ac.uk	Aberystwyth University
Zohra Wardak	wardakz@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University

Academic Staff in Attendance

Name	Email	University
Julian Brigstocke	brigstockeJ@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Marcus Doel	m.a.doel@swansea.ac.uk	Swansea University
Gareth Hoskins	tgh@aber.ac.uk	Aberystwyth University
Ihnji Jon	joni@cardiff.ac.uk	Cardiff University
Chris Muellerleile	c.m.muellerleile@swansea.ac.uk	Swansea University

Conference schedule at a glance:

Wednesday, March 11th

13:15-13:30: Welcome and Introductions
 13:30-15:30: Session 1
 15:30-16:00: Coffee/tea
 16:00-18:00: Session 2
 18:00-19:00: Open time
 19:00: Dinner

Thursday, March 12th

8:00-9:00: Breakfast
 9:00-11:00—Session 3
 11:00-11:30—coffee/tea
 12:30-13:30—Lunch

Wednesday 11th March 2026

Check in from 1pm

	Postgraduate Conference (Seminar Room 1)
13.15 – 13.30	<i>Welcome and Opening Remarks</i>
13.30 – 13.50	Blue Bell, Aberystwyth Lay and Indigenous Knowledge in Water Management: preliminary insights from Wales and future directions
13.50 – 14.10	Sarah Bowen, Aberystwyth Changing Minds, Changing Movements: A Qualitative Study of Far-Right Dynamics Across Two Nations
14.10 – 14.30	Molly Cranch, Swansea Ecological Security and Environmental Justice- the post-human turn
14.30 – 14.50	Finlay John Crawford, Cardiff What's 'Post' in Post-Extractivism? Theorising Transition in the Welsh Landscape
14.50 – 15.10	Rachel England, Swansea Understanding The Experiences of Deaf University Students in Wales: A Case Study
15.10 -15.30	Zohra Wardak, Cardiff The Graveyard of Empires: the production of resilience across space, scale and time within Afghanistan
15.30-16.00	<i>Afternoon tea and coffee, served in the Blaney Room</i>

16.00-16.20	Kirsty Usher, Aberystwyth Manual Labours of Love: The Wellbeing and Radical Geographies of Festival Riggers
16.20-16.40	Sanjeev Kumar, Cardiff High Streets as Quintessential Social Infrastructure – Exploring their role in economic revitalisation and community cohesion/ town-centre regeneration framework
16.40-17.00	Eugene Rourke, Cardiff Housing rights in the Wales' Private Rented Sector: rhetoric or reality and routes to homeliness
17.00-17.20	Chloe Thompson, Gloucestershire Understanding Welsh farmer decision making around net zero
17.20-17.40	Melissa Turgut, Cardiff Libraries as Quintessential Social Infrastructure: Exploring Their Role in Community Cohesion and Socio-Digital Equity
17.40-18.00	Rebecca Funnell, Bangor Material semiotics and bureaucracies in practice
18.00-19.00	Open time
19.00 <i>prompt</i>	Dinner, served in the Dining Room

Thursday 12th March 2026

08.00 – 09.00	<i>Breakfast</i> , served in the Dining Room
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Note: If you are leaving Gregynog on Thursday, please check out and deliver your key to the hosts in the dining room before the conference begins at 9:00.

	Postgraduate Conference (Seminar Room 1)
9.10 – 9.30	Tatiana Bodnar, Swansea Urban Acupuncture in South Wales: Pin-prick Solutions for Urban Regeneration?
9.30 – 9.50	Robert Cole, Gloucestershire Woodland Creation Decisions: A Typology of Private Land Managers' Behavioural Logics
9.50 - 10.10	Jill Gettrup, Cardiff Mainstreaming nature positive planning in Wales
10.10 - 10.30	Nirushan Sudarsan, Cardiff Understanding Racialised Young People's Participation in Neighbourhood Governance

11.00 - 11.30	<i>Morning coffee and tea, served in the Blayney Room</i> <i>(Theory School begins at ~11:30 with Keynote Interview)</i>
12.30-13.30	Lunch
13.30	Leave Gregynog Hall—or Theory School Keynote Talk—

Abstracts listed in order of appearance

Blue Bell, Aberystwyth
Lay and Indigenous Knowledge in Water Management: preliminary insights from Wales and future directions
My MA research examined the extent to which lay expertise is included in formal 21st-century documents relevant to flooding and the presence of lay expertise in at-risk communities, to determine its current and future potential contributions to flood resilience and policy in Wales. My PhD research will build on this work to explore the degree to which lay and Indigenous knowledges are included in water management and strategies across dryland environments. The research will encompass flood and drought management and perceptions, predominantly through the content analysis of water management policy and interviews with key actors in water management.

Sarah Bowen, Aberystwyth
Changing Minds, Changing Movements: A Qualitative Study of Far-Right Dynamics Across Two Nations
This study offers a qualitative examination of the contemporary growth of far right extremism in Australia and the United Kingdom. It explores how shifting attitudes among influential groups and individuals intersect with rising community polarisation, gendered narratives, and the resurgence of populist discourse. Through analysis of participant perspectives, contextual materials and the online space, this project illuminates the social dynamics that enable far right mobilisation and the ways these factors interact to shape localised expressions of extremism. It is hoped that the findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relational and discursive forces underpinning this evolving and timely phenomenon, at a time where extremism is on the rise globally.

Molly Cranch, Swansea
Ecological Security and Environmental Justice- the post-human turn
Post-human critical security studies reconceptualise the “referent” as both that which is threatened and that which threatens- challenging anthropocentrism by treating humans, ecosystems and other species as one interconnected system. Exposing hidden referents harmed by climate change expands who is recognised as needing political agency. This work develops a post-human, postmodern framework integrating other sentient species, future generations and Indigenous knowledges to foreground environmental justice. Fusing justice principles with critical security can reorient security from fear and resistance toward

recognition, fairness and rights to claim- advancing ecological security and environmental political theory.

Finlay John Crawford, Cardiff

What's 'Post' in Post-Extractivism? Theorising Transition in the Welsh Landscape

What does it mean to move "beyond" extraction in a Welsh context shaped by its industrial past and evolving policy future? This talk presents early work from my PhD, using a synthesis of degrowth and world-ecology theory to critically examine this question. This theoretical framework is being developed to analyse how contemporary ecological communities in Wales prefigure alternative logics, offering a grounded lens to explore the tensions and potentials of a 'just transition'.

Rachel England, Swansea

Understanding The Experiences of Deaf University Students in Wales: A Case Study

The research is being done:

- to make a difference at Swansea University
- to share the results with university policymakers in Wales
- to create more opportunities for deaf students who want to study at universities in Wales.

We will collect data from deaf people about their everyday life experiences who are now or were previously studying in the last 10 years at a university in Wales. We also want to focus on if they identify as having another protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and explore if this affects their experience as a deaf university student.

Zohra Wardak, Cardiff

The Graveyard of Empires: the production of resilience across space, scale and time within Afghanistan

This project connects the concepts of development and decolonisation, as a critique of conventional understandings of development and modernity by posting alternative Other ways of thinking and doing development (Said, 1985). In documenting and preserving such Other worlds and their knowledges from erasure, this project radically questions the Global North's normative assumptions of development, so that Indigenous and Global South communities bear a greater sense of legitimacy in setting the agenda for the classifications of their realities.

Its methodology is informed by postcolonial, feminist and creative traditions, namely interviews and ethnographic observation that are situated and context-specific to Afghanistan's geographies.

Kirsty Usher, Aberystwyth

Manual Labours of Love: The Wellbeing and Radical Geographies of Festival Riggers

There is a common conception that doing things with your hands is satisfying, exercise is good for you, travelling widens your perspectives and feelings of self-worth are vital to mental health. The main focus of this research looks at the working culture of travelling manual labourers. The participants in the project are mainly festival riggers, and their work life should tick a lot of those wellbeing boxes. Themes of both wellbeing and anarchism emerge in relation to identity, autonomy, spatial dynamics and resistance to dominant structures. Are these anarchist social working structures? Is this an antidote to conventional working life?

Rebecca Funnell, Bangor Material semiotics and bureaucracies in practice
This presentation examines the analytical value of material semiotics for understanding bureaucracies in practice. I will discuss the Aviva-funded Temperate Rainforest Restoration (TRR) programme, led by the Wildlife Trusts, which aims to establish woodlands that support carbon storage, biodiversity, and cultural heritage. The programme has faced significant bureaucratic challenges, particularly around conservation priorities, archaeological features, and Common Land Law, which complicate tree planting plans. I conceptualise bureaucracies as networks of people and things that ‘do’ different things depending on encounters of compliance, alliance, and mis/translation between parts of their webs; illuminating the multiple meanings and impacts of bureaucracies in practice.

Sanjeev Kumar, Cardiff High Streets as Quintessential Social Infrastructure – Exploring their role in economic revitalisation and community cohesion/ town-centre regeneration framework
This research investigates UK High Streets (HS) as critical social infrastructure (SI). Historically vibrant centres of commerce and social interaction are considered vital social and economic places. HS are uniquely positioned to act as multidimensional social assets that enhance community cohesion, economic resilience, and urban revitalisation. However, their role as SI remains poorly understood and underutilised in HS regeneration strategies, limiting their effectiveness in addressing socio-economic and urban challenges. The study aims to reimagine HS and develop a multidisciplinary framework to conceptualise, evaluate, and operationalise the socio-economic and cultural roles of HS as SI.

Eugene Rourke, Cardiff Housing rights in the Wales' Private Rented Sector: rhetoric or reality and routes to homeliness
'Progressive' and 'prevention focused' are terms that are frequently attributed to Wales housing policy and approaches to housing and homelessness. Yet arguably, the extent by which tenants residing with Wales Private Rented Sector (PRS) are aware of, and are able to, exercise their housing rights suggests that a dislocation exists between policy intentions and the reality of lived experience, which has implications upon individual housing pathways and routes into homelessness. This research seeks to critically explore disparities of policy intention, acquisition and applicability of housing rights and risks of becoming homelessness with in the PRS.

Chloe Thompson, Gloucestershire Understanding Welsh farmer decision making around net zero
Wales has committed to net zero emissions by 2050. Farmers can play a significant role in meeting this (Devenish 2022) but agricultural progress towards net zero has stalled (Climate Change Committee 2025). Progress requires understanding farmer decision making around net zero to develop incentives, tools, and support better suited to farmers’ needs. This PhD aims to work with case study areas across Wales, using a serious game as a creative discussion facilitation tool, surveys, and interviews, to address this.

Melissa Turgut, Cardiff Libraries as Quintessential Social Infrastructure: Exploring Their Role in Community Cohesion and Socio-Digital Equity
This project examines public libraries as vital social infrastructures, focusing on their role in fostering community cohesion and bridging social and digital divides. Once knowledge repositories, libraries now serve as hubs for cultural exchange, digital literacy, and community engagement. However, financial constraints, shifting demands, and difficulties in measuring social benefits pose challenges. Since 2008, austerity policies have led to UK library closures, staff reductions, and service cuts. By 2024, over 180 libraries had closed in England, with 2,000 jobs lost, disproportionately affecting deprived areas. A 2024 policy paper acknowledged libraries' expanded roles but failed to address core issues. With a new Labour government, this project partnering with Camden Libraries explores strategies to sustain libraries under financial constraints while promoting social and digital inclusion.

Tatiana Bodnar, Swansea Urban Acupuncture in South Wales: Pin-prick Solutions for Urban Regeneration?

Robert Cole, Gloucestershire Woodland Creation Decisions: A Typology of Private Land Managers' Behavioural Logics
As the UK struggles to meet legally binding afforestation targets, understanding private land managers' decisions to plant woodland remains a key policy challenge. This PhD adopts a qualitative approach to develop a typology of woodland creators, examining how different drivers and barriers shape afforestation decisions. Drawing on interviews with policymakers, private sector informants, and private land managers, the research constructs woodland creator types and explores their relevance for policy. By linking decision-making logics to the current policy landscape, the study identifies potential gaps and tensions relevant to future woodland creation.

Jill Gettrup, Cardiff Mainstreaming nature positive planning in Wales
The Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework 2022 commits the UK to transformational change to achieve “living in harmony with nature” by 2050. Wales embedded ambitious sustainability principles through the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 and has committed to nature positive planning. My talk will outline plans to explore the evolution of current planning policy and the implementation of nature positive planning, analysing Welsh Government ambitions and the discourse of officials, planners, and stakeholders to look for seeds of change and leverage points that signal deeper reorientation toward transformational outcomes in biodiversity governance.

Nirushan Sudarsan, Cardiff Understanding Racialised Young People's Participation in Neighbourhood Governance