

## **Panel 1: Rewilding higher education: Ecological engagements in the contemporary university**

**Convenor: Tristan MacCowan**

### **Panellists:**

- Mobilising the SDGs in higher education: Perspectives from Brazil, Canada and the UK - Alexandra Allel Henríquez
- More than messy margins: The potential of regenerative thinking in higher education - Nicola Kemp and Alan Bainbridge
- Critical imagination for transformative agency: Towards a pedagogy of questionings - Betzabé Torres and Lucy Avraamidou
- Deinstitutionalising the university for planetary sustainability - Tristan McCowan

Sustainability in its different guises has become a key area of engagement for higher education. Through the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as net zero carbon and other socio-environmental agendas, universities have aimed to reduce their negative impact and adopt a more regenerative role. These actions have variously taken the form of mapping existing work (taught courses, publications, community engagement and estates), actively aligning and prioritising areas of activity, and evaluating in relation to sustainability criteria (e.g. through new rankings and benchmarking tools such as GreenMetric, THE Impact or QS Sustainability).

This panel interrogates this key area of contemporary higher education, posing a series of questions for debate and analysis. How is sustainability understood and embedded across different forms of institutions and different functions of the university in diverse locations? In the context of marketisation, to what extent have institutions dovetailed sustainability with commercial interests (greenwashing), or alternatively encountered fundamental challenges to 'business as usual' through critique and activism. In the context of ecological collapse and multiple societal crises, is there a need for a more radical transformation of the sector and the emergence of new forms of institution?

After a brief introduction from the chair (Tristan McCowan), there will be four presentations. First, Alexandra Allel Henríquez will report on the findings of a comparative study of three institutions in Brazil, Canada and the UK, exploring how context influences the understandings of sustainability, its manifestation in university mission and actions, and its mobilising potential. Second, Nicola Kemp and Alan Bainbridge provide a theoretical exploration of universities as learning spaces for sustainable futures, looking at the complex interplay between the formal curriculum and role of the institution as a living lab.

Following that, Betzabé Torres and Lucy Avraamidou discuss the role of critical imagination in transformative agency, with three dimensions: facilitating practices that move beyond the self to recognize multiple human and non-human others; a planet-centred orientation to education transcending human-centered approaches; and troubling dominant spatial and temporal scales of thinking. Finally, Tristan McCowan

reflects on what a 'rewilding' agenda might look like in higher education, drawing on Illich's ideas of deinstitutionalisation and experiments of 'ecoversities' to reinvent practices of teaching and research. The presentations will highlight key arguments only, leaving ample time for questions and debate with the audience.