

## **The Finnish Urban Studies Conference 2026 – Session 19**

### **Peaceful coexistence and cities of hope: Living together amid urban inequalities**

#### **Session Chairs:**

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#### **Sessions III (5 presentations)**

##### **1. Telling stories of migration: hope as an encounter**

Anna-Kaisa Kuusisto, Docent, Tampere University

In my presentation I utilize the concept of encounter used, for example, by Helen Wilson (2017). I argue that migration as a lived experience should be understood as a multifaceted and multilayered encounter. First, it is important to recognize that encounters often involve difference. However, these “differences” should not be used as a basis for social distinctions. From this perspective, encounters always contain diverse power relations, many of which are unequal and situationally constructed through different intersectional positions. These power relations are not fixed; rather, they are subject to constant renegotiation.

Second, encounters always involve the possibility of creating new understanding through the idea of radical care and hope (e.g. Clark-Kazak 2022). For example, doing things together creates a possibility for surprise and for “being otherwise”. Various community initiatives offer concrete examples of how individuals, communities, and institutions commit to these encounters and seek to create spaces for peaceful coexistence.

I will illustrate my argument by discussing the urban community work which was carried out by the Migration Museum located in Lewisham, London. I ask, what kinds of encounters are told and visualised in museum’s activities and exhibitions? And what hope means when examined from the perspective of lived migration?

##### **2. Social-ecological justice in urban development interventions to foster hopeful coexistence**

Salla Eilola, Ulrika Stevens and Nora Fagerholm, Department of Geography and Geology, University of Turku

Peaceful coexistence and equality in cities require justice: correcting the institutional structures and practices that maintain socio-political marginalization and overlook the needs of non-humans, such as city foxes, bats, and a myriad of insects, and their habitats. The urgency of climate change, biodiversity loss, and social challenges, such as housing needs and segregation, in Nordic countries has prompted cities to develop project-based interventions that, even with good intentions, often risk perpetuating injustices. Examples of this include habitat destruction and gentrification due to neighbourhood upgrading. Assessing

and addressing justice implications of urban development interventions ahead of implementation is one way to foster hope for peaceful coexistence within diverse neighbourhoods as well as with non-humans.

In our presentation, we reflect on our assessment of social-ecological justice in an urban greening intervention in the city of Turku, Finland. The intervention aims to enhance urban biodiversity, engage residents in communal nature management, and co-design biodiversity measures in three neighbourhoods. Through full participant observation, we studied how exclusions materialize, harm to non-human beings is mitigated, and conflicting green space uses are tackled during the intervention. As researchers and members of the project team, we engaged in discussions on justice concerns with city authorities, planners, and project experts. The assessment shows drawbacks of a city-led intervention premised on citizen participation in terms of just urban development, as well as opportunities to adopt practices that elevate marginalized perspectives in cities.

### **3. Peaceful Coexistence through Denial? Invisible Inequalities in Everyday Urban Narratives in Kuala Lumpur**

Farah Aisyah Mior, JURECA Research Institute

Urban inequalities are often identified through visible markers such as segregation or displacement. Yet in many cities, exclusion also operates through less acknowledged mechanisms, shaping how people live together in conditions of difference. Drawing on mixed-methods research from a case study of Kuala Lumpur, this paper examines how urban inequalities become invisible through narratives of denial, normalisation, and depoliticisation, and how these contribute to fragile forms of peaceful coexistence.

Based on survey and qualitative data from Kuala Lumpur inhabitants across different neighbourhoods, the study shows how respondents frequently acknowledge uneven development while rejecting racialised or structural explanations. References to greed, traffic, and technical planning failures recur throughout the data, alongside accounts of marginalisation, displacement, and unequal resource allocation.

Rather than interpreting these responses as ignorance or contradiction, the paper situates denial as a socially and historically conditioned practice. In the Malaysian context, collective memories of ethnic conflict, most notably the riots of May 13, 1969, continue to shape public discourse, producing reluctance to explicitly name racialised inequality. This is further complicated by perceptions of socioeconomic difference structured along ethnic lines, rooted in colonial-era labour stratification and reworked through postcolonial governance and affirmative action frameworks, where inequality is experienced but rhetorically neutralised.

The paper argues that such discursive strategies reproduce spatial inequality by depoliticising urban grievances and limiting collective claims-making, while enabling forms of peaceful coexistence by containing conflictual narratives. When exclusion is framed as technical inconvenience rather than structural injustice, it becomes harder to contest through planning and policy processes while sustaining everyday social cohesion. By foregrounding denial as both a mechanism of invisibility and a condition for coexistence, this study contributes to debates on urban inequality and the uneven, negotiated nature of hope in multiethnic and postcolonial cities.

#### **4. City, Memory, and Power in Tehran: Comparing Qasr Prison and Enghelab Street**

Sara Sabet, School of Architecture, University of Oulu

This study examines how political collective memory becomes embedded in the physical fabric of Tehran, Iran. Considering the political significance of urban space in Tehran's contested context, the research seeks to clarify the layered relationships among city, memory, and power.

The central research question is: In a city shaped by multiple conflicting memories, what forms of memory politics dominate urban spaces, and what kinds of resistance arise in response?

To explore this question, the study compares two significant urban sites: Qasr Prison and Enghelab Street, examining how memory politics shape the management of space. The analysis identifies three historical layers: pre-modern, modern, and post-revolutionary.

The findings show that traditional Iranian spatial patterns mark the pre-modern layer, authoritarian architectural paradigms shape the modern layer, and an ideological reworking of memory characterizes the post-revolutionary layer. While the specific politics of memory differ between Qasr Prison and Enghelab Street, the patterns of resistance demonstrate similarities. In both cases, the built environment is not a passive background but functions as a cultural anchor, sustaining a potential of hope for the future.

In conclusion, despite top-down efforts to control spaces of collective memory, both cases reveal the presence of a civic perspective on cultural heritage, grounded in collective memory and creative forms of public action. This civic engagement offers potential for collective design for an inclusive city.

#### **5. Strained Coexistence in Unequal Cities: A Methodological Proposal for Detecting Conflict in Urban Regeneration Projects**

Carola Corti

Urban conflict often extends beyond what is immediately visible to the public eye. In contexts such as urban revitalization initiatives, where spatial, economic, and social relations are reconfigured, conflict unfolds across both material and less visible dimensions: it materializes through protests and claims addressing processes such as gentrification and displacement, while also taking shape in more latent forms through shifts in discourse, oppositional narratives, and negative sentiment circulating across different discursive arenas. In spite of this, current urban research and policy analysis largely overlook these dynamics, making it difficult to systematically capture and analyze emerging forms of urban conflict.

To address this gap, this study proposes a conflict detection Index aimed at making these hidden dynamics observable and analytically manageable, with the ultimate goal of supporting a more precise understanding of conflict and informing more balanced and inclusive urban interventions. The methodology involves stakeholder analysis, topic modeling, and sentiment analysis tailored to the context, applied to the study of narratives concerning a common urban issue. The approach is illustratively applied to NoLo (North of Loreto) district in Milan (Italy), selected as a paradigmatic case of recent urban regeneration processes in the city, characterised by rapid symbolic revalorisation, increasing market pressure, and shifting

socio-economic composition, where narratives of regeneration coexist with tensions over affordability, belonging, and displacement.

## **Session IV** (4 presentations)

### **1. Spaces of Care and Exclusion in DIY Skateboarding Communities**

Tom Critchley – Goldsmiths University of London, UK

Mikko Kyrönviita – Tampere University, Finland

Skateboarders are often positioned relative to cities and socio-spatial inequalities. On one hand, skateboarding is celebrated as an anti-capitalist praxis that radically claims space for community and play (Borden, 2001). On the other, skateboarders are described as “the shock troops of gentrification” that may *initially* transform city space, but the cultural capital generated subsequently underpins processes of redevelopment and gentrification (Howell, 2008). Such debates especially frame Do-It-Yourself (DIY) skateboard communities where bottom-up urbanism intersect situated skill-sets to create city experiments that affect change to the wider built and social environment (Kyrönviita and Wallin, 2022). But, at the same time, arrangements of practitioners often mirror the wider urban processes they seek to contend (Critchley, 2023). In doing so, DIY skateboard communities meet and test skateboarding’s “ethical turn” (Willing and Papalardo, 2023: 2), where skateboarders engage with feminist (Abulhawa, 2018), queer (Geckle, 2021), decolonial (Williams, 2020), and ecological (O’Connor et al., 2022) debates through the material-relational practices that bring such sites into being. In this session, and drawing from two DIY skate communities in London UK, and Tampere, Finland we ask: how do skateboarders negotiate care and exclusion within their DIY efforts? To explore this question, we account for open-ended and participatory nature of DIY design relative to more-formal, top-down urban practices. Within this context of building skate ramps, we also describe broader ethical-political efforts from skateboarders through initiatives such as structured skill sharing workshops, community gardens, theatre projects, hardcore music shows, charity fundraisers, mental health support networks, and more. In doing so, we position DIY skateparks as contested spaces of care *and* exclusion where material practices of DIY are imbued with relational ethics and politics whereby skateboarding serves as a medium for negotiating conflict and resolve towards more-equitable urban futures.

### **2. Creating Sonic Places of Hope through Outdoor Electronic Musicking in the City**

Oleksandra Nenko, Alejandro Montes de Oca, Otso Aavanranta, Dominik Schlienger

Our paper explores the possibility of “sonic places of hope” in the city. We build on the concept of places of hope (Nenko 2023), understood as anthropological places (Augé 1992) enabled by a communitarian mode of urban space creation grounded in interpersonal communication, trust, and emotional engagement. Such places are processual and non-fixed; they emerge as result of place-generating tactics (De Certeau 1984) through which urban communities peacefully make, negotiate, and dream about their own city.

Extending this framework, we develop the concept of “sonic places of hope” as fluid, sensorial sites of interaction, temporarily constituted through sound and sonic engagement with the city. In this case, place-generating tactics take the form of collective outdoor sound-making, intertwined with practices of movement through and exploration of urban environments. The emerging sonic places are ephemeral, intangible, and pop-up, despite their very real sonic “materiality” for participants. Creating utopia and enacting heteropia in urban space (Foucault 1967), while also encountering the constraints of urban order, sonic places of hope open an often-missing sensorial – specifically *sonic* – mode of reflexivity and of imagining more inclusive, just, and peaceful cities.

We draw on our research-creation project ExoSound, based in Helsinki, which centres on collective electronic musicking in outdoor city space and approaches sound as a practice of relational connectivity. Our theorisation of sonic places of hope is grounded in empirical material, including autoethnographic diaries, audio and video recordings, and participant feedback from sonic sessions conducted in different contexts across Helsinki.

### References:

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### 3. Great Expectations: Creative Futures in the Making

Marjaana Sederholm

In recent decades, hopeful imaginaries of creative urban futures have spread globally in the form of persuasive narratives, often accompanied by unreliable promises of long-term economic success.

Drawing on Helsinki city’s urban developments, the qualitative case study aims to evaluate the ways in which the popular “creative city” planning model has been interpreted, adapted, and applied within the specific history and geography between 2000 and 2025. The study focuses on the so-called “ownership” of the creativity concept. How does it work to include and exclude?

In this study, urban planning and development are understood as narrative activity — a form of storytelling. Hence, it will make use of narratology and literary methods of study in uncovering creative landscape. The presentation will introduce the draft of the first article.

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<https://projects.tuni.fi/ponte/>

#### **4. Place-making or place-taking? Participatory planning and slow violence in Kontula**

Hanna Yrjänä, University of Helsinki, hanna.yrjana@helsinki.fi

*Kulttuuriostari* [Cultural Mall] is a project funded by the City of Helsinki through participatory budgeting, aiming to strengthen Kontula mall's position as an urban cultural hub. During my ethnographic case study of urban regeneration in Kontula, the project found itself in a tumult. In spring 2025, media reported that the producer had denied the legendary Kontufestival funding, based on its headliners – an East Helsinki based rap group *Notkea Rotta* – being “middle-aged men who used to be celebrities.” Despite the project's subsequent attempts to clarify the decision, the statement had already caused sociocultural displacement among some residents and actors. The loss of influence over the feel of a place mobilized community resources, and the festival was organized without external funding.

In this presentation, I approach *Kulttuuriostari* as a temporary placemaking effort in the broader context of urban regeneration, which aims to enhance the “community spirit” and make Kontula a more attractive place for private investments and owner-occupiers. I argue that *Notkea Rotta* managed to politicize what was becoming a non-event of slow violence, bringing to surface the different temporalities, contestations and power relations that exist within communities that urban regeneration and participation is imposed on. Especially in super-diverse and territorially stigmatized neighborhoods, like Kontula, where there can exist suspicion of others, it is important for cultural placemaking to reflect how the place is already made, and who they exclude in what they choose to express about the place. That is if it wishes to not only signal hope but truly co-create it.