

RGS Session - Abstract

Dear colleagues,

Please find below a call for papers for a session titled **'Lost in Post-Fossil Transformations'** at the RGS-IGB Annual International Conference 2026 (1st – 4th September 2026).

To submit, please send your paper title and abstract (of up to 250 words) to Amy Walker (amy.walker@geo.uni-halle.de) and Jan Winkler (jan.winkler@geo.uni-halle.de) by the **13th February 2026**. The session will follow the classic paper format (single paper presentations of approx. 15 minutes, in-person only). Do get in touch with any other questions.

Best Wishes,
Amy and Jan

Session Organisers: Amy Walker and Jan Winkler (Martin-Luther University Halle-Wittenberg; Just Transition Center, JTC)

Lost in Post-Fossil Transformations

Socio-ecological transformations towards more sustainable, post-fossil, and just societies currently unfold through contentious and ongoing negotiations. Transformation is never only about turning towards something new; it also entails turning away from established practices, infrastructures, and ways of life. The escalating climate crisis and associated phase-outs and policy shifts foreground processes of disappearance, in which certain domains must be dismantled or discontinued. In this sense, transformation produces experiential forms of loss (Reckwitz 2024) and creates the conditions for emerging societal modes of farewell, letting go, or dealing with “transition pain” (Bogner et al. 2024). Developing further debates on emotional dimensions of sustainability transitions, this session focuses on how practices, affects, politics, and spaces of loss are implicated in transformative contexts, shaping socio-political relations and future pathways.

Loss has been discussed in geography, for example in relation to ecological loss and damage in a climate-changed world (Cunsolo & Landmann 2017; Hepach & Hertz 2023), as well as in studies of deindustrialisation, ruination, and vacancy (Meier 2012; Rohse *et al.* 2020; Zhang 2024). Only very recently have the first explicit attempts been formulated to conceptualize the “geographies of loss” (Runkel & Schramm 2024). To delimit an otherwise broad field, the session focuses on current socio-ecological transformations, including sustainability transitions, climate policies, and shifts away from fossil-based ways of being. At the same time, it approaches transformation more broadly as a situated and lived experience, and therefore resists tying transformation-related losses too narrowly to fixed objects or dominant narratives such as deindustrialisation or ecological collapse. Instead, the session foregrounds loss as *dispersed, unevenly materialising, and socially differentiated*, emerging within wider societal shifts and power relations. Contributions may explore how loss accompanies transformation from the outset—anticipated when change is envisioned or engineered, reactivated through past experiences, or expressed as mourning for futures that never materialised.

Against the backdrop of dominant narratives of progress, spaces for collective engagement with loss are often limited (Elliott 2018; Reckwitz 2024). This session therefore asks how practices and spaces of loss might enable social participation in transformation, and whether engaging with loss can open ethical and political perspectives for shaping just transitions. Loss raises difficult questions about the legitimacy of holding on and about how politically problematic sentiments—such as claims that “things were better before”—can be addressed without slipping into nostalgic or reactionary positions, or arguing about the moral order of societal ‘losers’ and what legitimacy groups have for trying to “hold on”. Yet if loss can function as a corrective to one-sided logics of progress, or as a critique of sustainability’s tendency toward preservation (rather than toward exploring progressive forms of letting go; Elliott 2018), we invite contributions that explore how the perspective of loss might be mobilised in critical and progressive ways.

We invite theoretical, empirical, and methodological interventions addressing questions such as:

- What are societal modes of (doing) loss, beyond the domains of death, funeral, and established forms of mourning? Through what practices is a fossil life mourned?
- How can we conceive of the political, ethical, and analytical potential of loss? Do related practices of bidding farewell, letting go (Bogner et al. 2024) or mourning (Cunsolo and Landmann 2017) help us understand loss as a shared and affective practice?
- Who decides what is mournable loss? Who has the capacity to ‘let go’, and who does not? What are the uneven ecologies of loss? What are the ethics of these power dynamics and efforts to label attachments as cruel optimisms or backwards-looking (Berlant 2011)?
- What can be more-than-human perspectives on loss (Moulton 2021; Tschakert et. al 2023; Phillips *et al.* 2023)? Besides ecological losses: can we – or should we – also mourn closing power plants, industrial infrastructures, and fossil machines?
- How do subjects deal with loss? What are the practices and relational spaces of consolation and processing loss (Jedan, Maddrell and Venbrux 2019)?
- Is there a spatial discharge (Anderson 2009) of loss, grief and consolation? What spatial configurations – couplings/decouplings, connections/separations, gaps, fractures – constitute what kind of losses (for whom) – and what capacities to process them (Maddrell 2016; Griffiths 2021; Rohse *et al.* 2020; Zhang 2024)? To what extent do intersecting layers of loss influence perceptions and practices of transformation?
- What socio-spatial relations shape the ability to (re-)connect the disconnected, reconcile the fractured, or re-orient disappearance? How might this spatial perspective contribute to a politics of loss within just transitions?

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