

(Re)Connecting Urban ‘Natures’

**An interdisciplinary symposium on transforming human-nature relations in cities
23-26th February, 2020 RMIT Europe, Barcelona**

Convenors: Dr Ferne Edwards¹, Dr Cecily Maller², Dr Brian Coffey²

¹RMIT Europe, ²RMIT Australia, Centre for Urban Research

Supported by EdiCitNet, People, Nature, Place and Critical Urban Governance research programs

This symposium takes as its starting point the need to (re)connect and (re)centre ‘human-nature’ relations in cities to move beyond assumed or extant binaries maintained by westernised ontologies, thinking, writing and practice. Taking an open view of what ‘urban natures’ are, the aim is to trace, know and re-forge more-than-human relations to guide different ways of urban living and governing. For settler-colonial societies, the need to (re)connect with ‘nature’ is becoming increasingly important in times of climate change and increasing precarity.

Sensing, governing, caring, learning, and producing’ are some of the relations that can be made more visible in cities through their more-than-human connections. Indigenous scholarship and relational theories, such as theories of social practice, assemblage thinking, and actor-network theory, amongst others, offer valuable approaches in which to redress the imposed urban nature-culture divide and with which to rethink urban human-nature relations. Relational perspectives recognise the interconnections between actors (human and non-human) and the specific contexts they not only inhabit but create. A focus on human-nature relations acknowledge the flows, networks, influences and atmospheres made by urban environments.

We welcome contributors across disciplines and sectors across the world around critical perspectives in which to advance current theoretical, methodological and practical approaches to rethinking human-nature relations in urban contexts. The symposium seeks to explore how to recognise different forms of urban ‘natures’, the current barriers for recognition, acknowledgement and engagement, and the potential for new or reinvigorated connections for reconfiguring our cities for humans and non-humans alike. The event will be structured around four core themes:

1. Place and place-making
2. Care and caring
3. Governance and governing
4. Imagining possible futures

Participation may take the form of a paper, presentation or creative work. For those who can’t travel to Barcelona, we will be including a ‘window to the world’ Skype-in or pre-record opportunity to present. It is hoped that outcomes from this event may result in a Special Issue or collaborative edited book. To fully develop papers in an onsite collective process, we ask contributors to submit a draft no later than two weeks prior to the event. Questions we seek to address include:

- *How can urban ‘natures’ be defined and what might be left out or lost in the process?*
- *Are all urban human-nature relationships beneficial, and if not does this matter?*

- *Who decides which urban ‘natures’ are valuable and should be prioritised? How are these decisions made?*
- *What urban ‘natures’ are underappreciated in settler-colonial mindsets and how can we re-centre them?*
- *How can we redesign the ways in which we collectively govern our relationships to place and each other for social and ecological flourishing?*
- *How can we re-think and practice critical urban governance in an unequal and warming world?*
- *Whose rights are at stake, what futures are possible, and which urban ‘natures’ matter?*
- *What are the impacts and influences of different scales of urban ‘natures’? How do ‘natures’ interpolate with governance approaches?*

The 3-day event will be held at RMIT Europe’s Barcelona campus from 23-26th February, 2020. Participation involves submitting an abstract, draft paper and attending in person or via Skype. With around 15-20 participants, the symposium will be structured around short presentations (based on submitted abstracts), activities and discussion. There is no cost to attend and catering would be provided during the day; however, travel and accommodation would be self-funded.

Writing Retreat, 26 February – 1 March

We would like to take the opportunity of bringing together scholars on urban natures from across the globe to continue developing papers for publication in a writing retreat to be held near Barcelona (exact location TBC) directly after the Symposium. We seek to organise shared accommodation with a shared kitty for food (to be cooked onsite) with local travel to make this an affordable self-funded event.

How to submit:

Participants need to:

1. Submit a 300-word abstract;
2. Indicate if you’ll be attending in person or by distance;
3. Indicate a preferred theme;
4. Indicate if you’d also be interested in attending the Writing Retreat.

Please send these details to ferne.edwards@rmit.edu.au by 20 December. Notification of acceptance will be sent in January.