

Conviviality

The Political Ecology Research Centre at Massey University and the Centre for Space, Place & Society at Wageningen University & Research welcome submissions for the 2021 virtual conference, *Conviviality* from June 1-7, 2021.



A woman farmer foraging on a mountaintop rainforest in northern Mozambique.
Photo credit: Serena S. Stein 2020

Can we live together in multitudes?

In this year's conference, we invite virtual presentations on the tangled global predicaments of climate change, agriculture, biodiversity, and conservation with a focus on *conviviality* – that is, the cultivation of vitality, regeneration, and restoration in shifting terrains of belonging and exclusion in multispecies communities. We encourage presentations from anthropologists, geographers, sociologists, artists, practitioners, and environmental humanities that contemplate a plurality of agri/cultures and stewardship possibilities, from indigenous food forests and agroecology, to rewilding the industrial plantation.

Even as efforts to promote biodiversity continue apace, extant forests, grasslands, and inhabited wildernesses remain protracted battlegrounds over socio-economic inequalities and ethico-political programmes. We welcome presentations that extend the reach of *conviviality* to landscapes where co-evolved plant, animal and human lives are intimately woven, yet often in collision amid fragmenting habitats and conservation efforts. What new promises and enduring failures await in pursuits to live companionably and thrive together?

Where do we find and encourage conviviality in agriculture and conservation?

Every day we make critical decisions about living together, cultivating harmony – however fragile and precarious – across kin and species, while drawing lines of who and what belongs in our collective flourishing. Conviviality is the art of coexisting and cohabitating, living alongside and often in tension. Across the world, multispecies communities are formed and transformed each day in arenas shaped by imperialism and parasitic invasions, new routes of mobility, chance encounters and historical accidents. A focus on conviviality follows changing networks of attachments and connections, interplays of tolerance and anxiety, and tangled global inequalities.

As a conceptual lens, ‘conviviality’ has been energetically refashioned in scholarship over past decades, from its popular definition as a term for friendly atmosphere and festive merry-making, and toward a utopian project of post-capitalism and post-imperialism. Rooted most notably in the work of Austrian-American philosopher, Ivan Illich, ‘conviviality’ became a lens to think outside industrial production and the toxicities and violence unfolding on extractive frontiers (Illich 1973:11). Achille Mbembe famously revived ‘conviviality’ quite differently as a lens to explore the participation of ordinary people in authoritarian African regimes of colonialism and post-independence (2001:110). For Francis Nyamnjoh, the collapse of ‘conviviality’ is closely linked with the preservation of individualism and hubris, exploitation, and epistemic injustice in contemporary Africa that endangers collective living (2017). More recently, *The Second Convivialist Manifesto* (2020) was signed by 300 academics from 33 countries, applying Marcel Mauss’s insights on solidarity and the gift toward a paradigm of global wealth redistribution and transforming human relations with nature. Emerging post-humanist critique reorients ‘conviviality’ toward deep interdependencies with landscapes and sensory experiences of soil (Given 2017: 133).

Using ‘conviviality’ as a point of entry into farming and biodiversity highlights the farm, the pasture, the garden, the forest as abundant sites of overlapping systems of cultivation, and of multiple ontologies held in the same frame. Farms incorporate not only people and living things, but also spirits and artifacts in a web of interdependence. Farmers exert control over nature but also relinquish control to a world of relations. Agriculture involves dwelling in and belonging to place.

Can we live, not at the expense of others? Can we farm without harm?

We look forward to presentations that engage analytically across scales, including intimate practices of cultivators from foraging and forest extractivism to industrial plantations, across diverse possibilities for affect and care toward plants and animals, soil relations, and nonhuman allies in human struggles. The looming question is how to thrive and reclaim collective prosperity, shaping our cultivation of food and broader economies around these goals (Raworth 2017). Where and by whom are we flourishing rather than extracting, nourishing rather than exhausting? Utopian visions of symbiosis, solidarity, and cooperation may look very different across grassroots activism and mobilizations, whether

by recent farmers protests in India, the work of Buen Vivir and Via Campesina, and in everyday grounded practices bringing people together to do the work of social and ecological transformation.

Guiding questions:

How is agriculture a site for reimagining the ways we behave as communal beings, practice reciprocity and responsibility, and cope with asymmetries of power?

How is conviviality historically constituted in different farming systems and models of conservation? How is conviviality variously measured?

Where, when, and how is the enduring myth of individual autonomy and control in agriculture and conservation challenged?

How do symbiotic relations in nature translate to conviviality in domesticated settings of farming?

What are the limits of conviviality?

What tensions might exist between ecological conviviality (such as cycles of matter, nutrients and life) and moral human projects of conviviality (such as veganism and animal rights)? What roles do animals play as dwellers, consumers, predators, and those who recuperate soil in regenerative farming systems?

What can scholars, community leaders, advocacy, practitioners, and artists do in efforts to understand and further multispecies connections? Do actions of convivial solidarity connect agrarian movements transnationally?

How can conviviality help illuminate a plurality of agri/cultures rather than a quest for universal values and beliefs? How else does the nexus of environment, agriculture, climate, and biodiversity encourage cross-cutting conversations and collaborations among political ecology, anthropology, ecology, art, policy, and more, on mutual dependencies among humans, plants, animals, and the planet?

A nearly carbon-neutral conference format

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic made international travel difficult, academic conferences were responsible for a considerable amount of carbon emissions as presenters flew from around the world to present in a single location. The Environmental Humanities Initiative at UC Santa Barbara estimated that running an online conference reduces the carbon footprint of a conference by 99%, as well as broadening their reach and accessibility. The significant financial costs associated with travel often prevented researchers from developing countries and postgraduate students from attending. PERC (Massey University) and the Centre for Space, Place and Society (Wageningen University) have co-hosted two joint online conferences, “Feral” and “Extraction”.

This conference will take place entirely online in June 2021, over a week. Contributors will not have to travel anywhere and there is no registration fee. Conference presentations will consist of material that can be submitted online as a video file. This could take the form of a webcam recording, an edited video, a PowerPoint or Prezi with recorded audio or another form of video. Each presentation should be no more than 20 minutes long. Instructions on creating and submitting presentations for the conference are online [here](#).

An important part of the online conference is active engagement with questions and ideas in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. All conference presentations and discussions remain online as an open-access resource. Following the conference, papers will be selected toward a major publication project in political ecology.

Abstract and panel submission instructions

If you are interested in presenting at the conference, please send a 250 word abstract with your name, e-mail address, and affiliation to **masseyPERC@gmail.com** by **Friday, April 5th 2021**. We also welcome proposals for panels and (digital) roundtable discussions, and we encourage innovative formats. If you would like to propose a panel, please send us a short panel rationale and details of panel participants.

Works Cited

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Mbembe, Achilles. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Nyamnjoh, Francis. "Incompleteness: Frontier Africa and the Currency of Conviviality." *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. 2017;52(3):253-270.

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