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Transitioning Regional Planning

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Special Session: Transitioning Regional Planning

In the face of the climate crisis, global sustainability goals and climate targets have been set, with companies, cities, and national governments committing to achieve carbon neutrality within 10, 15 or 20 years. Yet, the path to achieving these goals often remains opaque, obfuscating which actions need to be taken to transition towards planning sustainable futures. While cities frequently seek to advance solutions, regional interventions are equally crucial in tackling the wicked problems of the climate crisis, which transgress administrative boundaries and thus need to be addressed at a city-regional or regional scale.

In this special session, we aim to discuss how regional planning is transitioning and the roles regional planning could and should play in facilitating the global transition towards a more sustainable future. We aim to explore how innovative, experimental, and provocative regional planning practices transcend established mainstream planning doctrines, styles and instruments.

This special session aims to discuss regional planning from various angles and welcomes theoretical, conceptual and empirically oriented contributions reflecting on the ideas, conceptualisations and practices of regional planning. The session organisers are particularly keen on discussing the following four themes:

- **Foresight in regional planning:** A thorough discussion of time and temporality is needed, as planning anticipates uncertain futures while steering the transition towards a more sustainable path. Different methods of forecasting and backcasting have been used in planning, but little attention has been paid to inherent assumptions about time and the competing timeframes of various activities.
- **Regenerative regional planning:** The regenerative capacities of regional planning have hardly been explored, although, in the context of regional change, regions have often been portrayed as either “winners” or “losers”. There is a need to investigate how regions can “bounce back” or “bounce forward” after shocks and what role resilience and regenerative regional planning can play in framing such processes.
- **Phenomenon-based planning:** Contrary to the traditional understanding of planning systems, planning could be framed by major change phenomena rather than scalar responsibilities. ‘Phenomenon-based planning’ demands policy coordination and integration between different sectors, governmental levels and spatial entities.

- Regional planning and the climate imperative: The urgency of the climate crisis has raised debates about the need to prioritise environmental protection interventions over other values, for instance, economic development, participation, and collaborative policymaking. This questions the hegemony of neoliberal governance and the democratic ideals of regional planning in the face of climate crisis.

However, other perspectives on regional planning are also very welcome, including (but not limited to) regional planning in the context of degrowth; administrative planning reforms; tensions between city-regional and regional planning; regional planning cultures and practices; the use, style and storytelling of visualisations in (regional) planning; policy transfer and policy integration between regional planning and other levels and sectors of policymaking.