



BREAKING TIMES

SLOW VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

March 27-28, 2025

Ihc seminar room - Carrer de Can Magrans s/n - Inst Història de la Ciència RECERCA
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Background

This International Conference is part of the research project *Slow Violence and Human Rights* project led by Prof. Fornalé at the University of Bern and funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF). The project among other objectives, aims to explore the role of the concept of slow violence in the specific legal domain – access to justice – by means of three successive steps: 1) investigating when to situate climate justice claims; 2) identifying who is affected by slow distress, and 3) asking how – by what methods and legal tools access to climate justice can be ensured. It aims to prepare the ground for a reform of existing legal practice.

This conference falls also under the objectives of the Horizon Europe project HRJust (States' Practice of Human Rights Justification: a study in civil society engagement and human rights through the lens of gender and intersectionality) led by prof. Fornalé at the University of Bern. The project aims to address significant and important gaps in human rights regulations and to develop a theory of human rights justifications. HRJust aims to develop a theory of HRJ and a process for Systematic Ongoing Civil Society Engagement as a tool for a gender and intersectional inclusive Civil Society engagement.

The Conference falls under the PRIN Project *JUSTAINABILITY* which is based on the social innovations generated by a community in the first line affected by environmental impacts and to analyse their experiences in term of social mobility, co-production of knowledge, and alternative experiments. Its purpose is to present a new concept of sustainability that includes more profound questions about socio-ambient beauty.

Overall Aim

The aim of this international conference and workshop is twofold: firstly, to explore the relationship between violence and environment across time and space; and secondly, to explore the human rights implications of the co-existence of diverse temporalities and how this could impact access to climate justice in terms of 'toxic exposure'. To this end, by adopting the notion of slow violence, the Conference will unpack visible and less invisible human rights violations to build a new understanding of resistance. By zooming in on case studies, the Conference provides an opportunity to identify the tangible impacts of slow violence. The case studies will be turned into a distinctive process to map new trajectories for political developments and legal responses by adopting a long-term and bottom-up approach.

The presentations are organized around the following themes: 1) forms and periodicities of environmental violence; 2) the intersection between time, space and toxic exposure; 3) time and temporalities of human mobilities; 4) Emerging strategies to resist to the denial of access to climate justice.

The Conference is an interdisciplinary one that will bring together several disciplines: history, geography, law and sociology. This Conference aims to discuss also a book proposal/edited volume proposal provide comprehensive insight into the role and significance of time in access to climate justice through legal and political frameworks. This volume aims to provide comprehensive insight into the role and significance of time and temporalities in the regulation of international mobility and migration through legal frameworks. Papers presented at the international seminar will be included in the edited volume.

Prof. M. Armiero and Prof. E. Fornalé

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SLOW VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Session 1: Environmental Violence

Beyond the Climate Crisis Narrative: Slow Violence and the Legal Value of Time

Elisa Fornalé

We are currently facing a proliferation of phenomena with disastrous effects. These phenomena exhibit different temporalities. Sudden-onset events erupt at a precise moment in time and the 'right now' dimension is captured by existing legal frameworks triggering an immediate protective imperative. In contrast, slow-onset events – such as sea level rise, global warming, ocean acidification – postpone or dilute their harmful effects over time and space, sometimes concealing the human rights implications and rendering them deferrable and ultimately less protected. Thus, new legal axioms are needed for engaging with the temporal dissonance that prevents appropriate responses to the complex temporalities of human rights violations related to climate change. To take up this challenge, my presentation introduces the concept of slow violence to respond to the temporal turn of climate justice claims. The time is propitious: two requests for advisory opinions are now pending before two major international courts (International Court of Justice and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights). For the very first time, these courts will be confronted with extremely controversial questions of how to frame the obligations and duties of the international communities in response to global challenges that disregard the borders of nation-states.

Violence and Emancipation in the Pluriversal Contact Zones

Pluriversal contact zones (PCZs), as theorized by decolonial scholars Marisol de la Cadena and Arturo Escobar, are “tense interfaces” where relational and nonrelational, emergent and dominant modes of being coexist. However, PCZs “are uncertain as political terrain”, encompassing heterogeneous realities such as legal systems and infrastructures, regulations and natural elements. The ontological stability of PCZs is always unsettled by an excess, “an unknown togetherness”, and the subjects that inhabit them are exposed to the frenzy of living in, or prefiguring, other worlds (Notes on Excess: Towards Pluriversal Design, 2024, p. 32). I will present some concrete examples of PCZs, such as urban infrastructures, and examine the interplay between violence and emancipation, acceleration and slowness, that unfold within these spaces of political excess.

Federico Luisetti

Ecological Conflicts and Political Space in the European Crisis

Salvo Torre

The European territory has been affected by an increasing number of socio-ecological problems. In part, the overall crisis of reproduction (Fraser, 2028; Moore, 2019) of recent years has exacerbated local problems, in part the problems have been generated precisely by attempts to revive accumulation processes. According to Armiero (2021), accumulation processes can only be realised through the dumping of parts of the system, through a violence progressively affecting parts of the territory, population, biosphere. In the European case, it seems increasingly evident that one of the solutions pursued is the intensification of the late capitalists accumulation processes. In the peripheralisation of Europe socio-ecological crises, such as food crises, become more and more pronounced and constitute themselves as the locus of redefinition of the social structure, as in their historical function. The intensification of the processes, however, foresees a further acceleration of the processes of dumping and multiplying internal margins. The whole process poses enormous problems for the analysis of social changes and political forms. It also becomes necessary to redefine the role assumed by environmental conflicts in recent years, as well as the identification of the forms of violence exercised (Armiero, 2021; Nixon, 2011; Watts, 2013). The environmental conflicts of recent years have not only been crisis indicators, but also community-building experiences. Environmental conflicts have brought to light some of the historical limits of European democracies, but despite being one of the drivers of political space redefinition, they didn't produce lasting experiences.

The paper analyses some Southern European cases of environmental conflict in which opposition to processes of violent exclusion actually produced a discourse on community autonomy and innovative proposals for political organisation, but which at this moment seem to share a common crisis in the political proposal.

Abstracts

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BREAKING TIMES

SLOW VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Session 2: Toxicity, Human Rights, and Time

Perceptions of Slow Violence and Environmental Conflict in Colombian Indigenous Narratives

Based on the textual analysis of a series of literary testimonies by Indigenous authors regarding the impact of the Colombian internal armed conflict, this study examines how the narrative proposals of certain Colombian Indigenous peoples contribute intellectual and epistemological insights for an alternative approach to the notions of "slow violence" and "environmental conflict." The literary testimonies analyzed have been compiled in the collective volume *Recuerdo mi origen* (IDARTE, 2021) and were written by authors from various Colombian Indigenous communities affected by the internal conflict, including the Embera, Kamentsa, Yanakona, and Wayuu people.

Simone Ferrari

Within this framework, the presentation pursues two objectives: (i) to identify how the analyzed testimonies reveal unconventional forms of violence—such as "damage to cultural integrity" (Truth Commission, 2021)—in the impact of the Colombian internal war on Indigenous communities and how these forms relate to the notion of "slow violence"; (ii) to analyze how the consequences of war on the environment are represented from a cultural and political perspective of "cosmocracy" (Duchesne, 2019), understood as a native conception of democratic political practices that emphasize cooperation between human and non-human subjects within the territory.

Session 3: Time and Migration

The Temporal Dimensions of Family Separation

Stephen Lee

Although immigration law is commonly understood to impose territorial restrictions on migrants, it is also the case that immigration law foists temporal limitations as well. For the most part, documenting a migrant's presence in territorial terms is fairly straightforward. A migrant can show that they are present within the interior but documenting time spent in a place can be more challenging especially given the range of laws that seek to exclude migrants from social, economic, and political life. Thus, as migrants seek to compile an administrative record that might support an application for DACA or cancellation, the same pieces of evidence simultaneously establish proof of time spent in the United States as well as unlawful presence.

Importantly, the temporal nature of continuous presence requirements creates a false sense that these requirements rest on neutral or objective criteria. Because everyone is subject to time constraints and faces limitations dictated by life-spans, time-based deprivations offer a kind of unimpeachable fairness. The failure to qualify is often treated as the result of bad luck and not because of an unfair process or program since everyone operates under the same conditions of time that proceeds in days, weeks, months, and years. A recent cluster of Supreme Court has addressed temporal requirements in immigration law. The outcomes have been mixed with the Court construing statutory ambiguities and regulatory justifications both for and against migrants. But all of these justifications—even those that favor migrants—help to normalize the enforcement-centric nature of immigration law.

BREAKING TIMES

SLOW VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Session 3: Time and Migration

The Temporal Governance of EU Citizens: What to do with the Workers of the Past?

Sandra Mantu

A topic that is gaining traction in migration scholarship concerns the interlinkages between migration and the environment, including the legal implications that ensue when bringing these two fields together. In this contribution I will reflect on how migration and the environment are interlinked in discussions about the free movement of EU citizens. The starting point will be research that I have done on different forms of temporal governance in relation to EU citizens. The argument that I seek to develop is that these forms of temporal governance produce inequality, vulnerability and precarity across a series of domains which makes it possible to link socio-economic and ecological discourses of crisis and (in)justice. Temporal inequalities stemming from EU citizens' legal categorization illustrates the importance of understanding the possibilities of controlling one's time and the agency that one can exert over the future. Legal and administrative practices that categorize EU migrant workers as temporary because their employment relations are flexible has far-reaching consequences in terms of control and agency over one's present and future. The example of EU workers in the Netherlands in low-paid and insecure jobs illustrates how precarious and unequal labour translates into temporariness. In turn, temporariness becomes a tool to govern the presence of these citizens and their access to social services and goods. Through the lens of the temporalities of migration literature, the above-mentioned forms of temporal governance could be described as 'classic' because they seek to govern migrants through legal time and legal categorization. I will argue that a novel form of temporal governance can be traced in discourses about the green and digital transitions that are presented as solutions to the environmental crisis. These discourses effectively situate migrant workers in sectors incongruent with the twin transitions as 'outside time'. They are relegated to the past, they belong to a different time and to a capitalist system of production that is destructive for the environment and costly for society. In the Netherlands, the presence of such migrant workers and their usefulness are questioned in economic, social, and, more recently, environmental terms. What are the legal consequents of these discourses in terms of accountability and responsibility for the migrant workers whose place in an ecologically just future is unsure? This question is relevant to safeguard that the environment is not used as excuse to curtail migrants' rights and to stress that socio-ecological crises are interconnected.

The Implications of Climate Change on Gender-based Violence and Discrimination: are there any Impacts on Women's Mobility?

Elisabetta Lambiase

Climate change can be counted among the challenges profoundly affecting our time. The occurrence of adverse climatic events, whether of rapid or slow onset, contributes to exacerbating pre-existing inequalities, widening the gap not only between industrialised and developing countries, but also between the various existing social groups. The international community has long recognised the impact of this phenomenon in exacerbating the vulnerabilities already suffered by marginalised and/or discriminated against individuals, including women. Climate change therefore acts as a threat multiplier and is estimated to be contributing to forced mobility on a large scale. In this regard, the persistent asylum law gaps in national and supranational legal systems, as well as the lack of international instruments aimed at protecting migrants forced into mobility in the context of climate change are among the factors likely to undermine their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Although the international community is aware of the need to protect those in vulnerable conditions to a greater extent, the reality experienced by women in the Global South makes it difficult for them to access justice for the protection of their rights, which are often compromised by the pervasive discrimination they experience in their daily lives. The condition of acute vulnerability suffered by women, due to systemic gender discrimination and violence, is likely to worsen as a result of climate change and the near impossibility of exercising the right to asylum. Considering these premises, this presentation intends to investigate the adequacy of international law in protecting migrant women forced to mobility due to climate change. More specifically, starting from the findings made by international actors such as the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in its General Recommendation no. 37, as well as the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem, in her report on violence against women and girls in the context of climate change, the aim is to verify whether there is a gender-sensitive approach to climate migration that takes into account the particular vulnerability of women and is able to guarantee adequate protection. This will be carried out in light of the Istanbul Convention, as well as the important jurisprudential contributions of international courts on the subject. Ultimately, the analysis will highlight shortcomings in the current international protection system and seek to investigate what proposals in practice can guarantee adequate protection for migrant women.

Abstracts

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BREAKING TIMES

SLOW VIOLENCE, RESISTANCE, PREFIGURATIVE POLITICS

Session 4: Resistance and Prefigurative Politics

The Environment, Prefigurative Politics and Law: Is Translation a Betrayal?

Margherita D'Andrea

According to Ana Cecilia Dinerstein, the concept of prefiguration implies both the negation of the status quo and the affirmation of what is possible. These are concrete utopias that challenge the culture and structures of contemporary capitalism and aim to build a radically different kind of society within the existing one (2016). The relationship between prefiguration and the capitalist system challenges the dimension of law. For example, in the case of legal battles over environmental protection, conducted in the midst of uncertain scientific data and high social and value conflicts (Martinez Alier, 2009), law can constitute the divide between prefiguration and institutionalisation. Indeed, it is in this space that the vast amount of knowledge and expertise accumulated by struggling communities is at some point translated. What are the knots and dilemmas of these translations? Does the legal system erase certain knowledge, normalising the transformative scope of processes by neutralising conflict, or is law instead a tool that can also serve to root prefigurative imaginaries beyond the historical moment in which they are born, constructing precedents useful for changing the status quo (new regulations, principles, administrative acts)? There is probably no single epistemology of legal translation. Rather, it is a matter of looking at individual cases of environmental injustice, both to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which knowledge is translated, and to denounce its shortcomings and denials. I will therefore focus on a specific case study: the environmental struggle against the installation of one of the largest incinerators in Europe by the community of Acerra (southern Italy, Naples), an area already affected by decades of illegal landfills, which has become an authorised sacrifice zone since the late 1990s.

Austerity politics and responses to unsafety in urban parks in the UK

The UK government policy of austerity led to a major withdrawal of investment in public services and spaces since 2010. The subsequent decline, and the sharp impacts on people and places already made vulnerable, represents Nixon's (2011: 2) 'incremental and accretive' slow violence, the impacts of which are emerging over different timescales. This paper examines the case of urban parks, drawing on research in North East England that found high rates of 'fast violence' in the form of harassment, hate crime and other forms of violence taking place in parks against certain groups of women and men. As Christian and Dowler (2019) argue, the binary between fast and slow violence is a false one, as these violences are intertwined and exacerbate one another. Structural violence underpins everyday experiences of public parks, both in the wider context of austerity, and in diminishing confidence in the state and police, who are seen as aggravating unsafety.

Rachel Pain

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Heritage-making as prefigurative politics. Experimenting with practical imagination

Samuele Andreoni
Giusy Pappalardo

In this paper, we move from the assumption that heritage is not a datum, but a dynamic process of making, unmaking, and becoming. As such, it is not merely something to preserve, but a living, evolving practice, one that we must actively engage with, care for, and transform. In this sense, we frame heritage as 'living heritage'. Such perspective calls for a shift in how we engage with the past: it is not enough to merely look back; it is also pivotal to create new possibilities from it. This involves not just making inventories of our past, but actively inventing and retrieving from it for possible futures. We argue that living heritage can become a tool for prefigurative politics when it embraces the struggles of communities that reclaim socio-ecological spaces and the narratives surrounding them.

Starting from that, how can we explore and engage with the ways that living heritage can serve as a platform for communities' needs and aspirations in the present? How can heritage-making shed light on the invisible forces of slow violence and repression, and transform them into opportunities for resistance and political transformation? In this contribution, we aim to discuss and practically test a methodological approach currently being developed as part of the WRENCH project—Whispers of Time: Heritage as Narratives of Climate Change. Specifically, we propose a hybrid methodology that blends anthropological approaches (such as storytelling) with community-based spatial planning tools (such as collective mapping). This will allow us to explore how new imaginaries can be negotiated reciprocally and trustfully by local communities and policymakers.

Commoning and Cultivating Knowledges for a Just Transition. The Experience of Terranostra in Casoria, Southern Italy

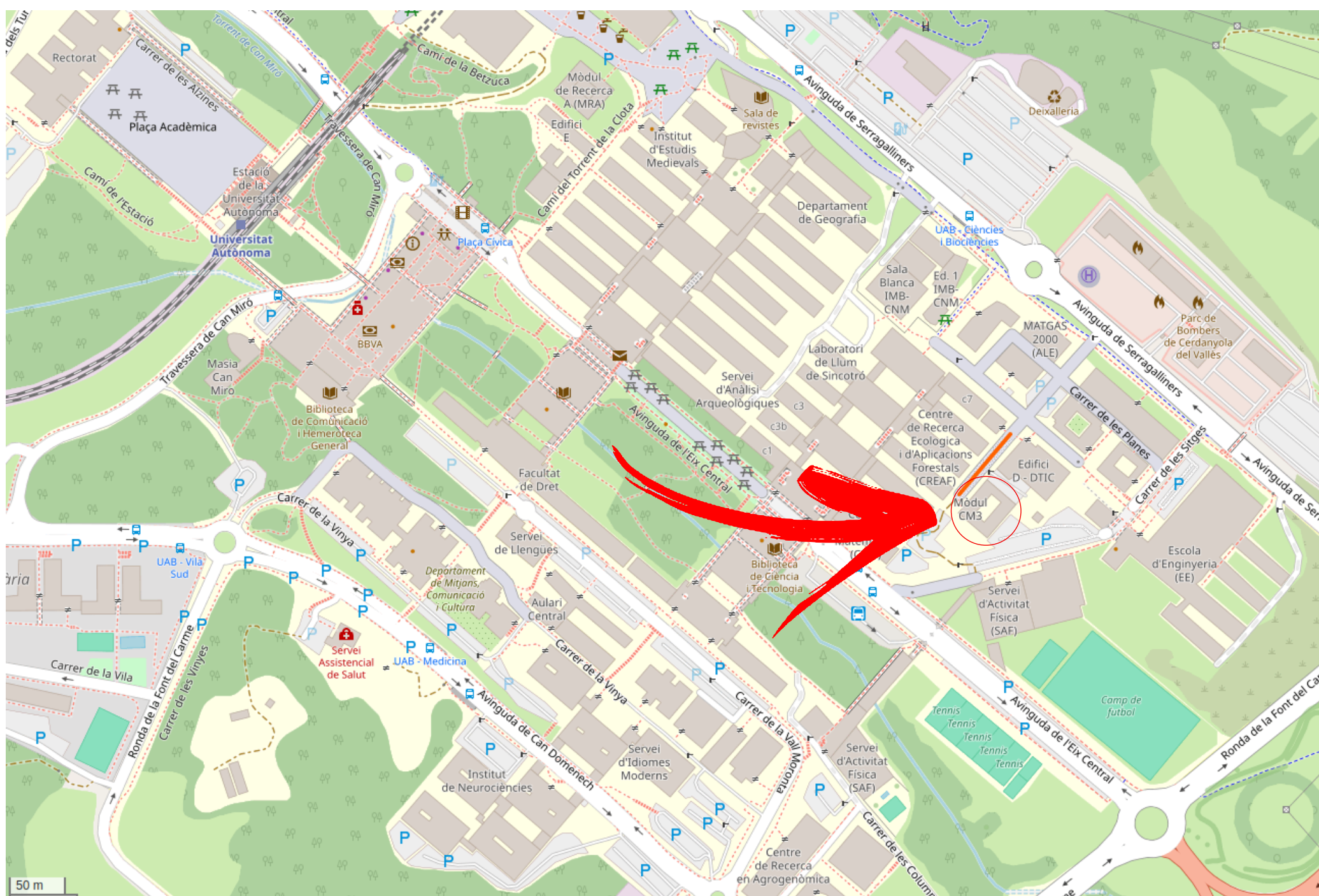
Roberto Sciarelli

This article engages with the debate regarding the connection between grassroots mobilization and the production of transformative knowledge for socio-environmental regeneration. By analyzing the case of Terranostra – Verde Occupato Autogestito, a community-managed commons located in Casoria, in the metropolitan area of Naples, the study explores practices of mutualism, agroecology and popular epidemiology that have contributed to the social and environmental regeneration of a territory marked by degradation and ecological crises. The experience demonstrates how the cultivation of grassroots knowledge can generate legal and ecological innovations, countering the dominant "wasting relationships"; in the region. Adopting a co-research approach, this work combines oral history, ethnography, and collective reflection to highlight the value of this democratic experience and investigating the potential of commoning and self-government in shaping pathways toward ecological transition.

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Venue



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Ihc seminar room - Carrer de Can Magrans s/n
Inst Història de la Ciència RECERCA

The IhC is located on the 3rd floor of the grey building.
Please stop by the entrance for accreditation

Maps

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Carlos Tabernero (iHC Uab)

Angela Pietrafesa (Università della Basilicata)

will coordinate a discussion on the movie

Silent River (2014)

Jason Jaacks, Director and Editor

Steve Fisher, Director and Producer

Produced by SplitFrame Media

Plot: Silent River highlights the ongoing pollution of the Santiago River in Guadalajara, Mexico, caused by industrial waste from one of the country's largest industrial corridors. In El Salto, Sofia and her family dream of a clean, free river and take action to make this dream a reality.

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