Learnings/Unlearnings:
Environmental learning, spatial design, and participatory pedagogies within institutions and beyond

Call for abstracts

Conference overview
As educational environments continue to evolve and support increasingly diverse learning needs, the importance of re-evaluating their purpose, design and use remains essential if communities wish to foster pedagogical space that is both inclusive and equitable. There are many concepts and methods that allow for a re-appraisal of formal, informal and non-formal learning environments. These include **environmental learning** (Adams, 1989; Ward and Fyson, 1973), **situated pedagogies** (Dewey, 1899; Kitchens, 2009; Perez-Martinez, 2019), **place-based education** (Gruenewald, 2003; Yemeni, 2023), and **civic pedagogy**[1] (Coleman 1998; Antaki et al 2024). Such intersecting and interdisciplinary approaches have enabled theorists, practitioners and learners to advance critical understandings of the central role that space, place and belonging has for educational process, whether it be located within, beyond or on the edges of the institution.

To realise this, built environment professionals and creative practitioners, as well as educationalists and policymakers, have long advocated for learning to happen beyond institutional walls to facilitate learners' engagement with the different environments they inhabit, both designed and natural. These methods extend from the local to the global, yet tend to emphasise the experiential, material, and spatial, while prioritising values of cooperation, and social and environmental justice (Dodig et al, 2025).

At the same time, the physical site of the learning institution, whether it be school, museum or university, continues to be scrutinised to understand how educational space responds to increasingly diverse user needs, as well as supporting social and ecological imperatives. To this end, historians, theoreticians and practitioners ask how questions of materiality, design, space and pedagogy intersect to support or restrict student agency, learning, wellbeing and community engagement (Brookes et al, 2025; Syeed, 2022).

This call for abstracts invites contributions by those working with education to explore the links between **environmental learning, spatial practices and pedagogy**, as a subject and practice for the future. In doing so, it aims to bring together diverse voices from different fields to share understandings of how educational environments work, whilst raising awareness of what is needed for these ideas and practices to thrive. We welcome suggestions for a variety of formats, such as workshops, papers, and performances, delivered individually or in groups. We ask participants to situate their abstracts in relation to one of the following three strands:

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[1] Civic pedagogy as a term comes originally from the field of political education, but has more recently come into use in the fields of architecture and urban studies, through the understanding that spatial decisions are political.

I: Institutional Space. Learning can happen anywhere: sometimes in classrooms, sometimes outside of them, in corridors, playgrounds, streets, natural environments or museums. Yet the institutional environment – its architecture, organisation, and material culture – has long shaped how learning is imagined and enacted. Institutional Space invites contributions that critique, frame and/or explore the sites, spaces and practices of formal education. From studios, classrooms and exhibition spaces to campuses, residential settings, forests and more. We welcome proposals that trace how formal learning institutions have been designed, built, and adapted over time, and how these spaces have reflected or resisted wider social, cultural, and political visions.

II: Edge Conditions. Increasingly, educational institutions around the world are seeking meaningful ways to collaborate and innovate with external partners – including but not limited to charities, cultural organisations, businesses and community and civic groups – to share expertise, widen participation and exchange knowledge. This strand explores what we term Edge Conditions - the sites, spaces, or places of learning on the margins, shared by institutions and external partners. We invite contributions that examine how spatial practices can activate thresholds found beyond institutional space, drawing on themes of reciprocity, participatory practice, spatial experiment, or place-based pedagogy. We seek work that questions and unsettles these boundaries, creating new, decolonial imaginaries of civic and institutional engagement.

III: Civic Space. Learning spaces are also situated *outside* or beyond formal institutional boundaries. Here we invite explorations of environmental learning led by grassroots, civic organisations and networks not limited to civic pedagogy, ecological pedagogy, and situated pedagogy. Whether participatory art practice, humanitarian work, ecological research, political activism, youth club, performance, or activity led by citizens or collectives, we are interested in abstracts that explore the link between civic spatial practices and pedagogies. Here we invite reflections on the autonomous, the community-led, and the informal, and how space and material ecology influences learning.

Research questions include:
- How can environmental learning[2] enable sites and spaces, both within and beyond the institution, to become more accessible, equitable and ethical?
- How can knowledge, shaped through collaborative art, design and spatial practices be used to enhance civic engagement, widen participation in higher education as well as built environment professions? What can be gained from these practices?
- What are the histories, theories, methods or practices that help us understand how educators have developed environmental learning? How have they facilitated student engagement, both within the institution and beyond it?

Contributions may include investigations into histories, theoretical discourse, policies, tools and methods, case-studies, and practice-led research. They may include creative projects, conversations, performances or interdisciplinary inquiry that examines how curricula,

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[2] 'Environmental' is here conceived in a broad sense and from the perspective of learning *from, for* and *with* the environment, whether human-made or natural.

pedagogical practice, and spatial design intersect to influence teaching, learning, and creativity within or beyond institutional contexts. We are interested in receiving abstracts that recover marginalised or lost perspectives – voices and experiences overlooked in dominant narratives of institutional or extra-institutional life, whether of students, teachers, communities, or alternative pedagogies. Proposed themes may crosscut and be combined.

We are hosting two formats:
- Papers or performances of 15 minutes/1,500 words
- Workshops of 75 minutes

Submission requirements
Please send in a 300 word abstract that includes the following
- A working title and an image in relation to your paper, performance or workshop
- The strand that you wish to address (institutional space/edge conditions/civic space)
- The format you wish to present (paper, performance or workshop)
- A biography of 50 words for each author
- Referencing system: Chicago style

Papers and presentations may be selected for a roundtable debate on urgent topics instead of for plenary sessions. Applicants may submit more than one submission but will only be offered one session (i.e. for the paper/performance 15 mins or workshop 75 mins or roundtable)

Website
Our conference website will be continuously updated in the lead up to the event.

Keynote Speakers
Jos Boys (The DisOrdinary Architecture Project, UK)
Akil Scafe-Smith (Resolve Collective, UK)
Pelin Tan (University of Batman, Turkiye)

Scientific committee
Emilio Brandao (KTH and Chalmers, Sweden), Reem Charif (University of the Arts London), Magnus Ericson (Iaspis – International Programme for Visual and Applied Arts, Sweden), Lee Ivett (London School of Architecture), Torange Khonsari (Architectural Association), Ruth Lang (London School of Architecture), Åsa Ståhl (HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design, Gothenburg), Kim Trogal (UCA Canterbury), Manijeh Verghese (Open City) and others to be confirmed

Organising Committee
Nicola Antaki (London School of Architecture), Kieran Mahon (University of the Arts London) and Meike Schalk (KTH Stockholm)

Key dates
Deadline for abstracts: **15 March 2026 to learningsunlearnings@gmail.com**
Notification of acceptance: **30 March 2026**
Conference dates: **3-5 September 2026 (London, UK)**

About the conference

The conference has developed out of a collaboration between the London School of Architecture (University of the Built Environment), KTH Royal Institute of Technology, and University of the Arts London, and builds on the Learnings/Unlearnings proceedings held in Stockholm in 2024. The conference is to be held within and without the institution, aiming to reach a broader audience to spark interest in the urgent topic of environmental learning and to connect to different stakeholders.

References

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