



6TH WORLD PLANNING SCHOOLS CONGRESS
FINLAND : HELSINKI / ESPOO / TAMPERE

World Planning Schools Congress 2026

PERIPHERAL VISIONS - RETHINKING PLANNING

Book of Abstracts

June 2026

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Table of contents

Keynote lectures & plenary sessions	5
Roundtables	9
GPEAN Special Sessions	52
Track 1: Accessibility and Mobility	53
Track 2: Culture and Heritage	133
Track 3: Economics	150
Track 4: Education and Skills	169
Track 5: Environment	201
Track 6: Governance	264
Track 7: Histories	345
Track 8: Ethics and Values	360
Track 9: Law	387
Track 10: Politics	399
Track 11: Practices and Actors	413
Track 12: Shelter	448
Track 13: Technologies	487
Track 14: Theories	528
Track 15: Crises	562
Special sessions	585
SS1: Activism in Peripheral Cities	585
SS2: AI and Planning Practice	590
SS4: City-University collaboration	601
SS5: Coastal Planning	617
SS6: Cross-sectoral Co-creation	628
SS7: Demographic Shifts	633
SS8: Ec(h)otoning Urban Futures	639



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SS9: Empty(ing) Spaces	648
SS10: Energy Transitions	654
SS11: Extractivism	673
SS12: Feminism and Intersectionality	679
SS13: Food	691
SS15: Good City	701
SS16: Land and Soil	710
SS17: Nordic Planning	725
SS18: Open City	730
SS19: Peripheral Centralities	739
SS20: Planetary Boundaries	759
SS21: Public Interest	762
SS22: Regional Design	770
SS23: Small Towns	778
SS24: Temporality	791
SS25: Tourism	809
SS26: Transforming Industrial Regions	818
SS27: Ukraine	822
SS28: Urban Experimentation	825
SS29: Water Futures	831
SS30: Waterfronts	843
Online presentations	849

2568 | Erica Ventura, Davide Vettore

Synthetic Data in AI-Driven Cartography: Reflections, Ethics, and Open Issues

The growing integration of artificial intelligence into modern cartography is transforming how spatial knowledge is created, verified, and used in planning practices. Synthetic data—statistically generated samples designed to mimic real-world conditions—now play a strategic role in filling informational gaps and supporting applications such as land-cover mapping, 3D reconstruction, and automated recognition of built heritage. However, their increasing use raises a fundamental ethical concern: when plausible information becomes operational within planning systems, how can fairness, transparency, and epistemic justice be maintained?

Building on debates from critical and communicative cartography, this contribution examines the ethical implications of the reality gap—the divergence between observed phenomena and representations generated algorithmically. While synthetic datasets can enhance equity by reducing territorial disparities in data availability, they also risk reinforcing opacity, bias, and “model collapse” when used without clear validation protocols. These dynamics are particularly relevant in planning contexts where decisions produce uneven externalities across different communities and territories, raising questions of recognition, inclusivity, and responsibility.

The paper proposes to reframe synthetic data as informed hypotheses rather than substitutes for empirical evidence. Through a discussion of recent advances in synthetic data generation, domain randomization, and explainable AI, it argues for minimum ethical standards in cartographic production: explicit traceability of data sources, transparent documentation of modeling processes, and the combined use of synthetic and real data to avoid recursive distortions. Such practices can help ensure that AI-assisted cartography remains accountable, scientifically grounded, and aligned with principles of justice.

By situating cartographic innovation within the broader debate on ethics and values in planning, the contribution highlights how emerging geospatial technologies can either exacerbate or mitigate inequalities. The challenge is to develop mapping practices that support equitable decision-making while acknowledging the cultural, social, and political dimensions of spatial representation.

1635 | Anthony Vanky, Timothy Small, Matthew Bui

Ethnoburbs and Invisible Enclaves: Describing Ethnic Place-making through Artificial Intelligence

The formation of ethnic enclaves in the United States often followed larger patterns of urban development. Whereas early communities such as the coastal Chinatowns were often dense, legible neighborhoods, groups arriving in the late 20th and early 21st centuries followed patterns of American suburbanization. These “ethnoburbs” embody similar complex social relationships as older or coastal enclaves but often lack clear spatial and territorial boundaries that make them legible. Despite containing businesses, community spaces, and resources for minoritized (sub)communities, these spatial enclaves may be rendered invisible due to the dispersive physical character of these suburbs and peripheral landscapes.