

First announcement for the 31st session of the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscapes – PECSRL 2026

Where: Ghent and Spa (Belgium)

When: Monday 7 to Sunday 13 September 2026

The first two days (7 and 8 September) will take place in Ghent. Excursions are planned on Wednesday (9 September), allowing the participants to continue for the last two days (10 and 11 September) in Spa. Following the conference, a post-conference excursion will be organised (11 to 13 September).

Organisers: the conference will be jointly organised by the Department of Geography of Ghent University (Veerle Van Eetvelde) and the Department of Geography of the University of Liège (Serge Schmitz)

Conference theme: Reconciling challenges in rural landscapes

Landscapes embody the continuous dialogue between people and land through time. They can be read as palimpsests of the interaction between biophysical and environmental processes and societies adapting and reshaping their surroundings. Main driving forces, such as demography, economy, politics, technology, and natural calamities, initiate a series of interacting landscape change processes.

The landscapes we live in today – the living landscapes – are shaped by complex feedback loops, often leading to a polarisation of geographical space. Densely populated areas are characterised by processes of urbanisation, intensification, industrialisation and competition between land uses, while depopulation has led to ruralisation, land and settlement abandonment, the loss of the agricultural mosaic, and the decline of services. As more people live in urban places than in rural areas and the rural population is declining, the relationship between urban and rural areas has changed over time.

However, the whole range of landscapes is currently facing similar challenges, such as climate change impacts, environmental degradation, social inequality, ... Landscapes with high and low human pressures have different resilience and adaptability when it comes to responses to flooding and drought, biodiversity loss, food security, heritage protection, landscape management, ...

The challenge is how to study these over- and depopulated landscapes from a structural, functional and historical perspective. How to understand the intertwining factors that play a role in landscapes? How to strengthen urban-rural connections? How to regenerate empty landscapes, reduce regional disparities, and support landscape community resilience?

The conference theme will focus on how to understand the process of finding balance or harmony among conflicting, opposing, contradictory demands or interests in landscapes

Important dates to put in your calendar

- > 5 December 2025 Call for sessions
- > 31 January 2026 Deadline for submission of sessions
- > 15 February 2026 Call for abstracts
- > 1 April 2026 Deadlines for submission of abstract
- > 15 April 2026 Notification of acceptance of abstracts. Opening conference registrations
- > 1 June 2026 Closing early bird registrations
- > 15 July 2026 Closing late registrations

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