

Wednesday Seminars

LECTURE SERIES IN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

18.03.2026 | 5 p.m. | @ Übungsraum IKSA | NIG, 4th floor

Joanie Willett (University of Exeter)

*More than Human Peripheries, Peripheralisation,
and the Mattering of Left Behind Regions*



Joanie Willett is an Associate Professor in Regional Development and Governance. Her research uses New Materialist philosophies to understand how people, economies, communities, and geologies, geographies, and ecologies co-evolve. She considers how people acquire the skills to be able to navigate and contribute to local economies, drawing on fieldwork in the UK and the US. She applies this to rural and peripheral regions, resource economies, and local government. In current and recent projects she looks at skills, finding work and local governance in critical minerals, and in nature recovery. This stems from an ongoing interest in understanding how regional development can be made more equitable, and people in regions can be best supported to adapt to changes in local economies.

This talk starts with the statement that Western populism is the ‘revenge of the places that don’t matter’ (Rodriguez-Pose, 2018), asking to what extent do rural areas matter if we foreground materials and imaginaries, rather than human activity. Drawing on Deleuzian assemblages, I argue that ‘mattering’ as currently conceived is too narrow and anthropocentric. Instead, foregrounding matter and non-human bodies and beings shows how rural areas are important parts of assemblages far beyond the countryside. The research draws on two examples to make these claims, firstly, by Appalachian coal and the way that it has (and continues to) shape US and global economic social, cultural, and biological environments. The second case study looks at Cornwall to explore the ways in which peripheral areas can be folded into how human imaginaries far beyond the region itself.



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