**TITLE: Under the surface: Tracing infrastructural transformations and violence in northern Vietnam’s uplands.**

**CONVENOR:** Prof Sarah Turner, McGill University, Canada. [Sarah.turner@mcgill.ca](mailto:Sarah.turner@mcgill.ca)

**FORMAT:** Single panel format with 4 presenters (1 x 90 minutes)

**ABSTRACT:**

This panel explores a series of infrastructural dynamics in the northern uplands of Vietnam, informed by recent conceptual debates and extensive ethnographic fieldwork. Challenging prevailing notions of infrastructure as neutral and apolitical, scholars have highlighted its inherently social nature (Ferguson, 2012; Lemanski, 2018; Amin, 2014). Such research sheds light on the intricate ways in which infrastructure, whether visible or concealed, permeates every aspect of society (Larkin, 2013; Rippa et al., 2020). In upland Northern Vietnam, ethnic minority communities negotiate how infrastructure can introduce new economic, social, and mobile capacities, while simultaneously exacerbating social and economic vulnerabilities (Ghertner, 2015; Schindler, 2014).

In contrast to studies on the impacts of conspicuous, large-scale rural infrastructure projects, this panel focuses on less-documented projects. Specifically, attention is directed towards how individuals and communities build infrastructural lives and create or reinvent livelihoods in northern upland Vietnam, when negotiating different state-sponsored or endorsed infrastructural projects. Our case studies include: the cultural and economic impacts of the growing use of concrete in housing construction including impacts on household reproductive norms and values; the slow violence and everyday politics negotiated by local communities dealing with new mining projects; the infrastructural violence brought about by a National Park separating communities from resource-rich areas and cultural resources; and the ongoing challenges for ethnic minority traders navigating inconsistent rules and enforcement with regards to marketplace upgrading.

Through such case studies, this exploration of infrastructural lives in various forms offers comparisons across time and space within these uplands to illuminate the on-the-ground negotiations and impacts of diverse infrastructural elements and related stakeholders.