Special World Café Sessions at GIScience 2025

As part of GIScience 2025, we are excited to introduce three World Café-style special sessions designed to foster deeper engagement, collaborative thinking, and interaction beyond standard conference presentations. These sessions will centre on roundtable discussions and are aimed at co-developing shared insights, culminating in the preparation of tangible outcomes.

Participants are encouraged to select the session that best aligns with their interests. Each session will provide a platform for open dialogue, diverse perspectives and rich exchanges across disciplines, career stages, and sectors.

The three sessions are:

1. Data privacy and ethics in location and mobility research

2. Generative AI: disruptions and opportunities in geography and the geospatial sciences

3. Targeting geospatial efforts towards sustainable cities and communities

Session 1: Data privacy and ethics in location and mobility research

Join us for a World Café-style session exploring the ethical, legal, computational, and social dimensions of collecting and using location and mobility data, particularly in the contexts where we conduct our research. Working in small, rotating groups, participants will engage in facilitated discussions to identify key concerns in an evolving privacy landscape and co-develop guiding principles for responsible data use.

This session will bring together researchers and, where possible, other conference attendees such as data owners, software developers, and community representatives. Together, we will tackle issues of data justice, surveillance, consent, anonymisation, representation of marginalised groups, and the trade-offs between data utility and harm—while exploring pathways for ethical governance, transparency, and accountability.

As an outcome of this session, we will synthesise insights to develop a vision paper (journal publication) on ethical and responsible use of location and mobility data, and participants will be invited to contribute as co-authors.

To help us plan for numbers, please indicate your interest in attending—or in attending and helping facilitate a session. Pre-registered participants will receive a short set of focusing questions to consider ahead of the conference, along with a quick survey to gather initial insights into GIScientists' perspectives on mobility and location data privacy.

Session 2: Generative AI: disruptions and opportunities in geography and the geospatial sciences

This session will explore challenges and opportunities emerging from advances in Generative AI (GenAI). Our aim is to explore a set of scenarios together from a balanced perspective. All viewpoints are welcome, we want an open discussion that takes a step back from the technical aspects of 'how' to instead explore the wider arc of possibilities, impacts and risks.

- Could a generative World Model offer real insights into geographical processes? If so, how could such a model be constructed? How might it be validated or trusted? Could such a model learn so it gets better over time? What potential impacts could this have on the discipline and on the workforce?

- Everybody wants to use richly described data and code, but nobody wants to write the descriptions. What role(s) could GenAI play in automating the rich annotation of digital research artifacts, such as data and code? How could this enrich our research community and facilitate reproducibility?

- We all know that GenAI causes some challenges with assessment. But what opportunities does it also bring to teaching and learning? Will these opportunities improve engagement and learning outcomes? What do we risk losing if we move towards GenAI with our teaching?

- Could GenAI used in urban planning and policy truly lead to better governance? What would it take to bring about this vision? And what are the risks if we take this path?

We may add other scenarios on the day if there is strong interest. Participants will be invited to choose the scenario that interests them the most to begin, but are free to move around and join other groups as the discussions progress.

Session 3: Targeting geospatial efforts towards sustainable cities and communities

We will host a World Café, a participatory action research technique to discuss research and policy implications, on how GIScience can lead to impact for progress on global challenges. The UN framework for the sustainable development goals (SDGs) provides an outline of targets and indicators that the global community determined to be important. We aim to collectively imagine the future we want to create for our communities and to consider how GIScience can support global progress.

Our conversation will be guided through discussion along themes from vision to action. We welcome participants to engage with a facilitator at each table to guide the discussion then rotate to the next themes on the (i) vision, (ii) challenges and obstacles, and (iii) policy implications.

- What role should GIScience play in shaping progress on global challenges?

- What are just, equitable, and actionable policies towards a path that will have measurable progress?

- What are the factors which prevent GIScience from reaching its full potential to facilitate progress?

- GIScience efforts can support meaningful community participation and shared decision-making. How should community-driven approaches be used to guide policy in the use of geospatial data?

We will then facilitate a group deliberation to summarize conversations and identify unique learnings. All participants will be invited to contribute as co-authors on a perspective paper that synthesises insights on targeting GIScience efforts toward sustainable cities and communities.