

**Open call for participants: 2 day conference on Social practice theory and public health: microbes, bodies and environments, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025, Mary Ward House, London.**

This is an open call for participants interested in joining a two-day conference on social practice theory and public health: microbes, bodies and environments organised by Elizabeth Shove (Lancaster University), Simon Cohn (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), and Cecily Maller (RMIT University).

This event is funded by the British Academy/Wellcome and there are 20 places available at the subsidised rate of £75 for both days, including refreshments (travel and accommodation are at your own expense). If you would like to attend and join the discussion, please send 250 words on what you are working on now and why the event is of interest to you. Send this to Elizabeth Shove ([E.Shove@Lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:E.Shove@Lancaster.ac.uk)) by **14<sup>th</sup> March 2025**.

**The conference**

It is widely recognised that biological, microbial and social processes interact. Behind this headline there is much less agreement about how the social world should be conceptualised and understood. One response is that practices – not social structures, and not individual behaviours - constitute the 'site' of the social. In recent years, practice theorists have generated a distinctive and powerful repertoire of ideas about materiality, inequality and global change. The result is an inspiring and generative body of social theory that provides the basis for interdisciplinary alliances and for new ways of thinking about the social dynamics of microbiomes.

This conference brings sociologists, anthropologists, historians, geographers, biologists and medical researchers together to exploit and explore the relevance of practice theory for analysing human-microbial relations and their implications for public health in a changing climate.

**Draft programme**

**Day 1: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

**Session 1: Social practice theory and microbiomes**

Chair: Simon Cohn, LSHTM

This session focuses on what social practice theories bring to the study of microbial worlds (Shove); the place of non-humans in practice theory (Cecily Maller, RMIT University); methods of investigating changing practices and their microbial implications (Beth Greenhough, Oxford University).

Coffee on arrival

11:15 – 11:30 Introduction to the conference and the first session – Elizabeth Shove

11.30-12.00 Three 10 min presentations. Elizabeth Shove, Cecily Maller and Beth Greenhough

12.00-12.15 Discussant (TBA) – bringing themes/contributions together

12.15 -13.45 LUNCH

13.45-14.15 Panel discussion in which Elizabeth, Cecily, Beth and the discussant respond to questions from the floor.

14.15 – 14.35 Positioning exercise round 1. In which presenters take up positions on a specified topic and are then joined, bit by bit, by everyone else.

## **Session 2. Social practices, infrastructures and microbes**

Chair: Stanley Blue, , Lancaster University

This session concentrates on issues of infrastructural design, provision, transmission and flow, focusing on water and air, and the intermingling of microbes and practices in urban and rural environments. Geographies of encounters (Stephen Hinchliffe, University of Exeter); metabolism and urban life (TBA); mosquitos and habitats (Karl Broome, Universitat Pompeu Fabra); agriculture and soil (Paula Palanco Lopez, University of Oulu).

14.35-14.45 Introduction to the second session – Cecily Maller

14.45-15.25 Four 10 min presentations: Steve Hinchliffe, TBA, Karl Broome, Paula Palanco Lopez.

15.25- 15.40 Discussant slot

15.40-16.10 BREAK – coffee/tea

16.10 - 16.40 Panel discussion in which Steve, TBA, Karl Paula and the discussant respond to questions from the floor.

16.40 – 17.00 Positioning exercise, round 2.

BREAK

18:00 – 20:30 Social event and large nibbles, at London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

20.30 – Walk through the microbes and practices of the past, including a visit to the John Snow pub in Soho

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## **Day 2: 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025**

### **Session 3. Social practices, microbes and bodies**

Chair: Cecily Maller, RMIT University

This session challenges established distinctions between the ‘outside environment’ and the ‘inside’ of the body. Contributors will focus on practices relating to the consumption and production of food (Jamie Lorimer, University of Oxford), on histories of germs (Michael Worboys, University of Manchester) and on the significance of practice theory for conceptualising the plasticity of human biology including epigenetic transfer (Stanley Blue, Lancaster University, Maurizio Meloni, Deakin University).

9.30- 9.40 Introduction to the third session – Simon Cohn

9.40-10.20 Four 10 min presentations: Jamie Lorimer, Mick Worboys, Stan Blue, Maurizio Meloni

10.20-10.35 Discussant slot

10.35- 11.05 BREAK

11.05 – 11.35 Panel discussion in which Jamie, Mike, Stan, Maurizio and the discussant respond to questions from the floor.

11.35-11.55 Positioning exercise round 3

12.00 - 13.30 LUNCH

**Session 4. Microbial disruptions and changing practices.**

Chair: Elizabeth Shove, Lancaster University

This session has to do with social and environmental changes, for instance in mobility, hygiene, land use and climate; and with the contribution practice theories can make to public health. Contributors will focus on social-environmental change (Rachael Wakefield Rann, University of Technology Sydney), on microbial biodiversity and interventions to promote health (Mikko Jauho, University of Helsinki), and on disruption and practice (Simon Cohn, LSHTM). The session, and the conference, will conclude with a panel discussion of the implications of all four themes for public health (Mike Kelly, University of Cambridge and Clare Chandler, LSHTM)

13.30-13.40 Introduction to the fourth session – Stan Blue

13.50-14.20 Three 10 min presentations: Rachel Wakefield Rann; Mikko Jauho; Simon Cohn

14.20-14.35 Discussant slot

14.35-15.05 BREAK

15.05-15.35 Panel discussion in which Rachel, Mikko, Simon the discussant respond to questions from the floor

15.35-16.00 Thoughts on implications for public health (Mike Kelly and Clare Chandler)

16.00-17.00 Final positioning exercise, thoughts about the future and reflections on the highs and lows of the event.

End.