

Call for Abstracts

Regional Studies Association Annual Conference 2020

Transformations: Relational spaces, beyond urban and rural

17th – 20th June 2020, School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Global megatrends are starting to transform the way we live, work, interact, finance, produce and consume. At the same time, the increasing environmental impacts of human activities have sharpened the focus on sustainability of further development. New technologies potentially provide an opportunity to address, perhaps for the first time in the history of mankind, a substantial majority of the fundamental societal challenges, from nutrition, energy availability and sustainability, to the access to all kinds of products, services and information. However, these same global megatrends can also be highly divisive and therefore represent one of the biggest challenges for a global social, political and economic cohesion and even peaceful coexistence in more than a generation. The key question we want to ask then is: “How can we transform our urban, rural and regional spaces to meet the challenges they face?”.

The conference will address this broad task from differing perspectives:

I. Smart cities and regions

It is contended that automation, robotisation, artificial intelligence and other new ICT-based technologies – the Fourth Industrial Revolution – are in the process of transforming global supply and value chains. Digitalisation and its associated socio-technological innovations are having profound impacts on production and consumption practices globally and in doing so are helping to shape and reshape the political and governance landscapes of our cities and regions. In opening up new possibilities for democratic engagement in decision-making, transformative practices are also heightening feelings of marginalisation and disengagement. Who are the winners and losers stemming from the digital transformation of our urban, rural and regional spaces? What are the transformative elements shaping spaces and relations among them? What role can policy and policymakers play in ensuring more equitable urban, rural and regional futures?

II. The regional dimension of climate futures

As the 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Special Report made clear, global societies are standing at a climate change cliff-edge. The decisions taken by international agencies, national and local governments, individuals and households will shape, in profound ways, the climate futures of our cities and regions. Adaptation to climate change requires an understanding of the opportunities and limitations of mitigation and the risks posed by future climate change. Low carbon transitions, strategies of slow growth and the politics of climate justice remain in embryonic states despite decades of research and lobbying. How will these debates about climate futures shape urban, rural and regional spaces?

What are the challenges facing cities and regions in addressing climate risk and implementing strategies of mitigation and adaptation? Is technology the answer and what strategies, tactics and practices are needed to empower urban, rural and regional spaces to deal with endemic climate challenges?

III. Mobilities

The circulation of people, goods and services are shaping in profound ways the social, economic, cultural, environmental and political configurations of cities and regions globally. We see this in the way that the movements of people, goods and services have been transformed through new infrastructures and technologies that are changing everyday engagement with the places where we live, work and play.

The movement of 'data' is changing the way that citizens engage with cities and regions and is at the heart of rollout financialisation across urban-regional economies. At the same time, the transfer of policies and import of 'experts' is entangling places in increasingly complex ways that are underpinned by policy practices involving balancing competition, exchange, redistribution and reciprocity. The extent to which urban-regional mobilities are deepening social and economic inequalities, driving environmental trade-offs, promoting governance practices servicing 'shareholder interests' rather than promoting sustainable futures requires further conceptual and empirical elaboration.

Conference themes:

Regional innovation and technological change	Sustainable tourism
Demography, labour markets and migrations	The future of EU, Brexit and W Balkans
Financing regional transformations	Climate change, energy and environmental sustainability
Entrepreneurship and innovation	Globalization and de-globalization
Spatial economy, infrastructure and housing	Governance, policies and institutional change
Regional inequalities and EU cohesion policy	Populism, nationalism and social change
Agglomeration, clusters and externalities	Inclusive growth
Value chains and international trade	Future of metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas

We welcome papers from all – academics, researchers, students and those working in policy and practice. The event is inclusive and offers networking opportunities for all in our field. The organisers welcome proposals for special sessions, themed workshops and innovative forms of networking and collaboration. If you would like to organise or offer a session to the conference, please contact Katharina Bürger at katharina.buerger@regionalstudies.org.

Abstract submission and registration details will be available in due course.

Academic organisers:

Associate Professor Vasja Rant, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Dr Sonja Šlander, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Professor Marko Pahor, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

RSA Conference Manager:

Katharina Bürger, katharina.buerger@regionalstudies.org, +44 (0) 1273 698 017