

Conclusion: 2023 RSA Annual Conference



By Sila Ceren Varis Husar (email).

From the start of the conference to the end, one can see how the general theme of “transforming regions” has been rethought/re-deliberated in the different channels of regional research. Accepting and classifying the common challenges on the one hand and creating a platform for dialogue on dealing with these challenges with the help of regional research. With the conference, the RSA community successfully achieved this.

The conference features the main programme and side events, bringing together various communities and networks. The Young Scholar Initiative’s Academy on Regional Studies, the JRC’s SMARTER Conference stream and a Networking Workshop for Early and Mid-Career Women in Regional Studies and Regional Science. The latter focussed on empathetic leadership in academia as an integral part of the wanted change. Quoting Jennifer Clark, the new editor-in-chief of

Regional Studies, it is essential and inevitable “not passing the pain” to new generations, colleagues and fellow researchers. Leaders, or people in higher positions, can act as change agents for a better work and research environment. This could result in good and compassionate returns in terms of integration to extended networks to having more room/space for improvement both individually and for the common good.

The main conference started with a plenary by providing a strong perspective on Green Global Value Chains for sustainable development on a regional and global scale. This involves particularly greening what already exists in the regions, also known as the green transition. Sustainable upgrading through intermediate goods and/or services is an appropriate example. So, the main question here is *How does this theory impact on policy?* The RSA’s approach is “Research Today Policy Tomorrow” by, amongst others, supporting a series of policy impact books, one of which has recently been published on *“Harnessing Global Value Chains for regional development: How to upgrade through regional policy, FDI and trade?”*. The potential of Green GVCs for offering a new window of opportunity for less developed regions in the ever-changing geo-political situation in the world has been once more underlined via the plenary session. The session also showed the strong relationship between research and organizations by including intergovernmental organizations (OECD) and private businesses (Business Sweden) in the discussion, which is another important part of the policy-making process.

A new RSA Research Network on Transformative Knowledge Regions has the potential to be the central part of the aforementioned change since knowledge should be taken as a crucial performative driver of societal change. Discussing knowledge regions for reaching out to sustainable societal development goals necessitates highlighting the transformative role of systemic innovation. Knowledge should no longer be taken as the primary provider of competitiveness of regions and greater amounts of economic returns but as a means of problem-solving based on specific challenges.

Last but not least, the closing plenary and the annual lecture of the journal *Territory, Politics, Governance* reiterated sustainable future requirements. Simple as it is, quoting Janez Potočnik, current market conditions undervalue the human capital and overvalue the production capital; there is no valuation for the natural capital, which is extremely alarming. The natural resources and their place in the

global value system are still a serious uncertainty to debate on regional research.

The closing plenary returned to what was discussed in the conference's opening plenary and added a holistic framework regarding steps to a sustainable future. To overcome the planetary crises, we need to redefine the socio-economic system. Any decision must consider holistic well-being criteria for nature and people instead of being one-dimensional, short-term, purely economic-success seeking and nature-destroying. Even though these are just a few fundamentals for transforming spaces, they clearly show that a sustainable and resilient future can be built when these dimensions are considered parallelly.

Conference photos, plenary recordings and a short conference video of the 2023 Annual Conference in Ljubljana are available at [2023 RSA Annual Conference](#).

The next RSA Annual Conference #RSA24 will be held 11th -14th June 2024 at the University of Florence, Italy. For more details, please go to [2024 RSA Annual Conference](#).

We hope you can join us in Florence for the #RSA24.

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