Regions in Transition III: Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic



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Editorial on Recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic

By Stefania Fiorentino, Robert Bowen and Eduardo Oliveira

The overarching theme for the three issues of Regions in 2021 is *Regions in Transition*.

This third and last issue of 2021, issue 11, concludes the theme of Regions in transition by discussing the future of cities and regions in the recovery from COVID-19. The Editorial Team invited authors to contribute with articles investigating new forms of research that emerged as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, comparing recovery process across geographies, as well as sectors of activity and their performance in terms of employability. New planning practices and policies have also been called into the debate, questioning the future of our

cities, the relationship between density and healthy cities, the emergence of new working spaces, transport dynamics and the availability of green infrastructures for further urban and regional resilience. At the time of writing, there is still much uncertainty over the end of the pandemic and the measurable impacts and effects that will be registered over our regions. However greater challenges and new research horizons have definitely emerged for the future of our discipline.

The two articles in the Spotlight section adopt a very original point of view to reflect on new challenges induced by the pandemic. In the first article, "Is remote working emptying the city?", Ilaria Mariotti tackles the timely topic of the future of working patterns and their impacts on spaces, looking at early impacts of lockdown and social distancing measures in Milan (Italy) and projected future scenarios. The author here presents a conversation with regional economist Phil McCann, considering the possible direct and indirect effects of an increase in remote working rates. The wider research project associated with this article was supported through RSA's Small Grant Scheme on Pandemics, Cities, Regions & Industry and looks at the wider implications of remote working and the rise of new hybrid workspaces in more peripheral locations.

In the second article "Harnessing Covid-19 Experiences in Pandemic Regions for a Tentative Framework of Urban Resilience", by Aysun Aygün Oğur, Ebru Kurt Özman and Zeynep Özdemir**,** the authors review the different global responses to the pandemic spread from the perspective of urban resilience. The article evaluates the "capacity to resist, respond, adapt, recover and reorganise" of different countries. Following the resilience framework, the authors classify the different strategies and measures implemented by different countries in the past two years, to respond to the new challenges as either an effort to mitigate the pandemic, or recover from it, or even adopting a proper specific management strategy, in other words changing their urban governance. The authors conclude by highlighting the need for coordination in the future over resilience-oriented and risk management response strategies.

In the Frontline section, Beth Cummings, Sam Burvill, Robert Bowen, and Leonie Themelidis explore a well-being network approach to COVID-19 recovery, looking at the case study of the 4theRegion organisation operating across the Swansea Bay city region in west Wales, UK. They note that well-being is increasingly discussed in relation to regional development and point to examples of Iceland and New Zealand as countries using well-being measures to underpin

policymaking. The same is true for Wales, where the Well-being of Future Generations Act (2015) is considered the first national well-being policy worldwide. The elements of this act of prosperity, resilience, health, equality, cohesive communities, cultural vibrancy and global responsibility can provide a valuable foundation to the post-COVID-19 recovery in ensuring that businesses can develop greater resilience, while the wider economy can maintain a better focus on developing prosperity and environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the focus on well-being places greater emphasis on the wider well-being of the population, such as an improved work-life balance, rather than an emphasis on typical economic measures, such as GDP or economic growth. The case study of 4theRegion underlines the role of well-being in underpinning the focus of regional development on promoting a place-based approach to development.

This Issue contains four Regional Insights articles. Enrico Vanino, in "The Role of Industrial Density in the Health and Economic consequences of the COVID-19 Crisis", contends that the most striking feature of the COVID-19 pandemic is the marked spatial difference in the spread of the virus. In their research project funded by the RSA's Small Grant Scheme on Pandemics, Cities, Regions & Industry, the research team combines highly granular data for 7200 neighbourhoods across England for the period between March 2020 and April 2021 to quantify the importance of population density versus employment composition on the spread of COVID-19. They specifically look at the concentration of *key workers*, critical or essential workers who are considered to provide an essential service that cannot be done remotely from home. In their article "Assessing Economic Resilience in COVID-19 Recovery: Challenges and insights from cross-national comparison", also supported through RSA's Small Grant Scheme on Pandemics, Cities, Regions & Industry, Will Rifkin, Terry Clower, Jacob Irving and Keith Waters sought to determine how to assess how a recent history of economic resilience and growth in certain industries could lead those industries to support a region's economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. Their analysis was intended to "include any OECD nation with accessible, publicly available data with sufficient industry detail and geographic disaggregation to allow for meaningful regional assessments of risk and propensity for early recovery from the economic consequences of a pandemic." The aspiration was to project which regions would find it difficult to recover from COVID-19 disruptions. Katia Adimora, an early career researcher, writes about "The US-México border post-COVID-19: reflections on discriminatory actions

against Latinos". The author specifically focuses on what seemed to be a double-standard approach to crossings: while the US citizens were allowed to enter and return as they pleased, Mexicans were scrutinised and prevented from crossing the land border. For the purposes of this article, two personal stories of two Latinas were collected. Felix Nana Kofi Ofori discusses "Strategic policies adopted by African Union (AU) and European Union (EU) to revive Member-States' economies post COVID-19 crisis". The article shows that the EU suffered high mortality death rates compared to the AU during the Pandemic, however, the comparative analysis done in this article suggests, that the EU's member-states are strategically positioned to revive the socio-economic wellbeing of their populations. The author concludes by calling for post-COVID-19 development policies across Africa that hinged on both improving resiliency and accelerating transformation to realise sustained economic welfare gains.

The three issues of 2022 will be announced early in January through social media platforms.

Editorial team

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