

Regions in Transition I: Sustainability challenges and opportunities in cities and regions



DOI reference: 10.1080/13673882.2021.00001086

Editorial Issue 9: Sustainability challenges and opportunities in cities and regions

By Robert Bowen, Stefania Fiorentino, Eduardo Oliveira

The overarching theme for the three issues of *Regions ezine* in 2021 is **Regions in Transition**. The coronavirus pandemic has led to new ways of thinking and operating in recent months, whether through the emerging prominence of virtual spaces, changing working habits, or feelings towards supporting the local economy. Transitions can be seen in a broader sense, as the experiences of recent

months could be seen to enlighten attitudes towards change. The three issues under this theme of transition discuss emerging issues of recovery from the coronavirus pandemic, as well as longer-standing matters relating to redefining the urban-rural balance, and developing more sustainable practice.

Issue 9 of *Regions* explores a range of articles on the topic of sustainability challenges and opportunities in cities and regions. In the Spotlight section, Carolin Schack, Thomas Neise, David Heimann and Martin Franz from Osnabrück University, Germany, present work from the 'Grey goes Green - Transformation of Industrial Areas' research project. The paper analyses the formation of networks and partnerships between municipalities and companies to identify success factors in implementing sustainable development in old industrial areas. This network building is recognised as a way of overcoming major challenges and enhancing sustainable transition.

The issue contains six Regional Insights articles, with case studies from Europe, India and Ghana. The first article, authored by Sabine Dörry, Christian Schulz, Elena Emrick-Schmitz and Nicolas Hercelin, looks at sustainable finance with regional development, discussing examples from France, Germany and Luxembourg. The paper responds to the need for a transition to more sustainable economic and financial solutions to strengthen regions due to the various challenges crises faced by societies. The authors encourage the exploration of links between alternative economies and sustainable finance, and how these could contribute to socio-ecological transitions in European regions. The second paper in this section looks at the combination of supply and demand-side eco-innovation policies for regional sustainability transitions. Authors Hendrik Hansmeier and Sebastian Losacker advocate the work of Tödtling et al. (2020) on scenarios for the differences of supply and demand innovation across regions, as well as arguing the importance of combining place-based supply-side and demand-side innovation policies for environmental innovations. Such policies can create regional lead markets and support sustainability transitions. In the third article, Luzie Sam discusses sustainable agriculture, exploring a transition towards a sustainable global food system, positioned in the Sustainable Development Goals framework. The paper questions the feasibility of achieving sustainable agriculture, and discusses trade-offs required to meet the SDGs. It is acknowledged that no one-size-fits-all method exists in developing sustainable food systems, however, small cautious changes to production and consumption

can constitute a sustainable transition.

Authors Lakshmi Priya Rajendran, Chris Maidment and Arindam Biswas discuss the sustainability paradox of peri-urban regions in India in their article, which reflects on the case of Chennai. They provide a better understanding of peri-urban area as unique 'places', rather than simply as regions of transition and flow, and draw attention to the lived experiences of these places based on conversations with residents. This research highlights new opportunities through planning and policy changes, enabling a more symbiotic relationship between the urban and rural. The fifth article in this section by Helene Heinze investigates human-nature relations in the globalised food system, discussing convivial conservation, and questioning whether this promotes a more sustainable food system. Conclusions state that implementing the visions of convivial conservation would likely strengthen human-nature relations, and develop more positive perceptions of natural food. However, convivial conservation remains an evolving concept in a complex global food system, and therefore requires implementation into practice before for the efficacy can be appreciated. The final article in this section investigates challenges and opportunities of sustainable development in Accra, Ghana. The author, Felix Nana Kofi Ofori, examines the challenges and opportunities of sustainable development, with a view to determining whether the appointment of Ghana's president as SDGs advocate has contributed to improve the sanitation of the city. The paper discusses the principles of the sustainable development goals and how this relates to national and international efforts to ensure sustainable developments of cities and nations, with a focus on the health and wellbeing of both humanity and the environment.

In the RSA highlights section, Yonn Dierwechter provides a report on the Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability research network, paying tribute to the role of the late Dr Tassilo Herrschel in its development. The network aims to connect work on 'smart cities' with innovative and creative urban and regional policy making, and has featured at prominent events in recent years.

This Issue's Research Hacks article sees Khandakar Farid Uddin and Md. Salauddin discuss their research on how Covid-19 has challenged PhD students. Findings of their work in Australia point to a reduction in productivity, a need for scholarship extensions and additional funding, as well as concerns over the impact on health and wellbeing.

Overall this issue underlines the varied transitions that are occurring in regional research, not only as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also through longer-standing changes in attitudes and norms. Building on the theme of Regions in Transition, the forthcoming **Issue 10** will focus on **Redefining urban-rural balance in changing times**, and will be published late September 2021.

Regions ezine Editorial team

Eduardo Oliveira | Stefania Fiorentino | Robert Bowen

If you are interested in submitting something then contact us at office@regionalstudies.org