



## **EVENT REPORT OF THE RSA RESEARCH NETWORK ON POLYCENTRIC URBAN REGIONS**

By [John Harrison](#) and [Michael Hoyler](#) (in collaboration with the other research network organizers, [Xingjian Liu](#), [Evert Meijers](#) and [Ben Derudder](#)).

### **The RSA Research Network on Polycentric Urban Regions in nutshell**

'[Polycentric urban regions](#)' (PURs) have become a key concept in regional studies and described extensively in our [previous article](#) published in Issue 4. In that issue, we reported on our first event '**Conceptualising, Identifying and Analysing Polycentric Urban Regions**' held in Delft in January 2019. In this Issue 5 of *Regions*, we are pleased to be able to report on the workshop recently held at [Loughborough University](#).

### **The event 'Planning and Governing Polycentric Urban Regions'**

The aim of the event titled 'Planning and Governing Polycentric Urban Regions' that took place in Loughborough, UK, on 2-3 September 2019 was to examine new insights into the effectiveness of the polycentric regional development model in general, and the planning and governance of PURs more specifically. This followed a series of special sessions during the RSA conference in Lugano in 2018 to launch the research network, and the first workshop in [Delft](#) where the focus was on conceptualising, analysing and identifying PURs.

The relevance of PUR-related research has been reinforced by the fact that the concept has attracted considerable interest from policy makers and regional planners. A range of normative plans and policies have been proposed advocating 'polycentric regional development'. In policy terms, PURs have been championed by advocates as an innovative way to manage urban-rural relations and framed by the normative goal of sustainable spatially balanced territorial development. We see this in Europe, where following the [European Spatial Development Perspective](#) (ESDP), [European Spatial Planning Observatory Network](#) (ESPON) and the [Interreg IIIB](#) programmes have advanced PURs as a key mechanism to achieve territorial competitiveness and cohesion. We see it in post-reform China which has seen its fast-paced urbanisation, initially characterised by decentralisation and rescaling of state power leading to intercity competition, captured by collaborative projects such as plans for PURs in recent years. Meanwhile, more generally, a spatial planning agenda focusing on 'megaregions' - large-scale regions centred on multiple, more-or-less closely located urban centres - has been devised, emphasising the supposed benefits for competitiveness and resilience. This said, the development of (polycentric) urban regions is not a spatially and socially homogenous process. It is important to identify people and places that are 'winners' and 'losers' in city-regional processes. Equally significant is identifying the successes and failings of the polycentric development model.

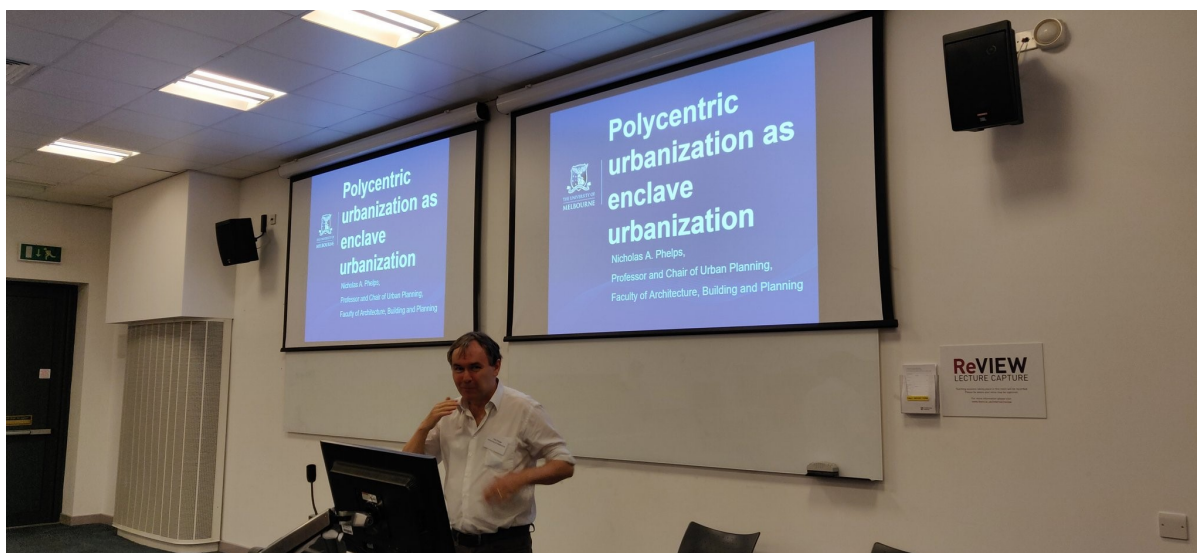
### **Key themes for the workshop included:**

- Local, regional and national development policies for PURs
- Coordinating planning and governance of PURs across fragmented arrangements
- Similarities and differences in approaches to planning and governing small-scale, medium-sized and large-scale PURs
- The challenge of planning and governing cross-border PURs
- Assessments of the impacts that polycentric regional development has on peoples and places.
- (Overcoming) constraints to polycentric regional development
- Planning and governance in, for and beyond PURs
- Achievements, failings, future for the polycentric development model
- Illustrative cases where the PURs development model has been implemented (un)successfully

### **Keynote presentations and thematic sessions**

The event was structured around three keynote presentations by:

[Nicholas Phelps \(University of Melbourne\)](#) on 'Polycentric urbanization as enclave urbanization.'



[Christophe Sohn \(Luxembourg Institute of Socio-Economic Research\)](#) on 'Polycentric imaginaries and the rescaling strategies of cross-border metropolitan regions'



[Kathy Pain \(University of Reading\)](#) on 'Rethinking the polycentric urban region: thinking about space as socially constructed and consumed'.



Alongside this, we had five thematic sessions comprising three papers each, exploring the themes of:

- Interlaces and PURs
- Ports, airports, rail and infrastructure in PURs
- Planning and governing infrastructure and transportation in PURs
- Integration and tensions in planning and governing PURs
- Cooperation and strategy for PURS

The workshop was attended by delegates from 10 countries across 4 continents and included an equal balance of participants across those who were PhD researchers, early-career, mid-career and senior professors. The event was documented on Twitter via [#RSA\\_PURs](#).

### **About the authors**

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