

Report on the Regions in Recovery e-Festival 2022. Report on special session “Citizen-led inclusive recovery for the regions: Alternative to the winner-takes-all economic models”



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COVID-19 has deepened inequalities. This is one of the theses presented in the report UN-Habitat Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future. A special session chaired by Jay Mitra of the University of Essex, UK, on ‘Citizen-led inclusive recovery for the regions’. An alternative to the “winner-takes-all” economic models developed in this thesis, focusing on urban economics aspects.

The starting point for the discussion during this session was the observation that the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed weaknesses in existing

economic models, including regions, towns and cities, whereas the main objectives were to show the benefits and conditions needed to emerge locally rooted citizen entrepreneurship and to present such practices, then reflect on how they will contribute to the study of citizen entrepreneurship and to what extent this phenomenon shall contribute to regional recovery in the long term.

The speakers, representing both academics and practitioners, focused on the representation of research results, experiences and reflections about possible solutions to the current reality and possible alternatives to the still dominant “winner-takes-all” economic model. Five panellists – representing four countries (UK, Poland, India and Germany) – addressed the role of locally rooted citizen entrepreneurship, the importance of culture as a key driver for social inclusion and community well-being, the power of localism as a driver to strengthen regional resilience and accelerate recovery, as well as learning how the sharing economy can boost citizen entrepreneurship.

The speakers’ presentations were followed by a vibrant discussion summarising the theoretical considerations and practices of the presented approaches. There are several focal points that can be derived from the whole session indicating the future direction of regions in recovery. Focusing on the future within the idea of where we go from here, the role of localism and locally rooted citizen initiatives clearly resonated. It is in actions on a local scale that participants of this session recognise an opportunity not only to “return to normality” but also to build resilient cities for the future. “We need agile reactions to fragile situations.” – this sentence expressed by one of the speakers (Professor Mariusz Sokołowicz) perfectly sums up the idea of people-led recovery of regions proposed by the participants of the session. Local actions are critical to achieve global goals.

Summing up, although it seems that this pandemic is slowly coming to an end, it is only the starting point for recovery. Strengthening regional food production and supply, enhancing public engagement, supporting citizen entrepreneurship – these are some of the solutions presented during this session, although it should be born in mind that there is no single approach that can be universally prescribed – and that is why the localising of the undertaken actions is crucial. Events such as the *Regions in Recovery* global e-festival are a great opportunity to hear about the experiences of practitioners from remote parts of the world and use this experience to implement solutions locally.