Transforming Regions: Policies and Planning for People and Places



By Daniela Carl is Deputy Chief Executive Officer at the Regional Studies Association and manages the Association's Events and Conference programmes.

This is the theme of the Regional Studies Association's Annual Conference 2023, which will be our largest knowledge exchange and networking gathering. Originally planned to take place in 2020, the conference had to be postponed due to the pandemic. After the long wait, we are excited to finally bring together a global audience of academics and policymakers from over 55 countries in beautiful **Ljubljana** for the **2023 Annual Conference**.



We have worked with partners at the School of Economics and Business at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and the Ljubljana Tourism Board for the last five years. It will be wonderful to welcome our delegates to the city finally. We are also working with several partners who are supporting the conference. Ljubljana Tourism Board promo video.

The conference offers a busy programme with a variety of session formats ranging from plenaries, specially convened and general paper sessions, and professional development workshops, along with social and networking events, technical and post-conference tours and side events, such as the EU Commission's Joint Research Centre's SMARTER conference stream on Urban and Rural Transformations for Sustainability and Resilience.



We will also feature our first PowerPoint Karaoke at the conference, which promises to be very interesting and a great way to meet new people and unwind after a busy conference day.

It's not just us and our partners who are buzzing about the conference but also the global audiences who have signed up either in person or online. We have now reached the total capacity for the conference and closed the in-person registration; however, you can still join the conference online.



A major conference such as the RSA's Annual Conference has, without a doubt, an impact on the conference destination, bringing in many international delegates who stay in local hotels and spend money in the local economy. Some delegates might extend their stay beyond the conference and explore the region further. We very much welcome this as we aim to support the region's economic development.

Delegates can also book pre-and post-conference activities to extend and prolong the time they spend in Ljubljana and the region, thus increasing the benefits of the conference.

This will all have a positive economic impact on the regions, but potentially, there is also a less positive impact on the environment. The Regional Studies Association is committed to improving the conference's sustainability performance and decreasing environmental impact.



The RSA's Annual conference programme is peripatetic, meaning we travel to new venues yearly. Unfortunately, because not all venues and destinations are equal in terms of meeting our sustainability standards, we must work within the parameters of what is possible in the venue/ destination that offers to host us.

For the 2023 Annual Conference, we have been working with partners, such as the Ljubljana Tourist Board, venues, and caterers, to reduce the conference's carbon footprint.

In partnership with the Tourist Board, we are encouraging delegates to consider less impactful ways of transport, i.e., traveling by train to Ljubljana. As the main conference venue is slightly outside the city centre, we have negotiated free public transport for our delegates for the conference duration in Ljubljana. The conference badge will also act as a bus pass allowing free travel in the city.

We are running the conference in a hybrid format to provide researchers who cannot join the conference in person or do not wish to travel with an option to be part of, and contribute to, the conference as a presenter or by taking part in the discussions.

We will also run our Board meeting, held during the conference, as a hybrid, allowing for the online participation of Board members who cannot attend the conference.

We have reduced the conference's paper consumption by using the RSA Hub Events and Engagement App, which allows users to schedule a personalised programme, provides all conference-related information, and offers the facility to network with other delegates. Anything that needs to be printed, we will produce in Ljubljana to reduce the amount of material we courier to the destination.



We have selected the conference's catering company based on their competitive rate and environmental credentials. Catering will offer packed lunches using local/regional ingredients and paper instead of plastic packaging.

In addition to reducing the conference's environmental impact, the RSA is socially responsible by supporting researchers in their early careers and from low-income countries.

As part of this, the RSA has allocated funds to cover nine conference bursaries (free conference places) which have been awarded to PhD students and early career researchers. In addition, the RSA's Polish Section have also offered conference bursaries and travel grants to help researchers attend the conference in person.

We support the career development of early career researchers by offering the opportunity to participate in the early career plenary speaker competition. This allows the successful candidate to be a plenary speaker at the conference and

present their research to many in-person and online participants. The successful candidate will also have their conference fee, accommodation and travel covered by the RSA. The successful early career plenary speaker at the 2023 Annual Conference is Alexander L. Q. Chen of Roskilde University, Denmark.

As part of the conference, we are also organising professional development sessions which aim to support researchers' career and skills development. These sessions are designed for researchers at different career stages; everyone is welcome.

We are also working with the Young Scholar Initiative (YSI), which will deliver a pre-conference Academy on Regional Studies. Successful applicants will receive financial support from YSI to travel to Ljubljana.

As well as these initiatives, we are also working with the RSA's Early and Mid-career Women in Regional Studies and Regional Science Network. We will host their workshop on Empathetic Leadership as part of this conference.

And finally, as with our membership rates, we offer discounts to members from low-income countries or if they are in their early careers, extending the benefits of the conference's knowledge exchange and career development opportunities.

We here at the RSA are constantly thinking about how we deliver our events, the materials we use and how we dispose of them, aiming to reducing the footprint of the conference and increasing sustainability and the positive impacts.

We always welcome ideas on how we can improve what we do and what we consume. Please get in touch with me by email Daniela Carl.