

Report 9: Ellen Hjort, Session V. Historical & Futures Studies for Regional Planning & Design



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One of the sessions at the 2024 RSA conference in Florence focused on Historical and Future Studies for Planning and Design. The chair, Sulevi Riukulehto, opened the session with a short introduction about the importance of thinking about the past and present.

John Harrison from Loughborough University presented a forthcoming book that he, Daniel Galland and Mark Tewdwr-Jones about the history of regional planning

as published in the journal *Regional Studies*. Harrison explained that while in early editions of the journal, regional planning was a dominant topic, it was rarely discussed in the years 2007-2020. Since 2021, however, regional planning has been re-emerged with a particular focus on the future. Harrison and colleagues note that the nature and disciplines of regional planners have changed overtime, but not all regional planning scholarship is published in the journal *Regional Studies*. Still, some research topics from earlier eras seem very similar to today's, and new concepts are not always new. The authors identified a presence of four or five regional concepts/imaginaries, which are consistently used while others shift or disappear. The book *Regions in Evolution* is expected to be published in 2025 – so look out for that!

Chisun Yoo presented a comparative study of megaregion evolution conducted with Yirang Im and Catherine Ross. The comparison included examples from Japan, Korea and the US. Increased connectivity of regions through globalisation results in mega-regions with growing importance. Yoo and colleagues define a megaregion as “A spatial unit between current largest scale of planning and the entire national territory” and analysed planning documents and reports from the mid-2000s to the present. Yoo explained the planning systems of the three countries and that, especially in Japan and Korea, megaregions have shifted from being spatial phenomena to being spatial goals or solutions. Mega-regions were often organised from the bottom up, but this can create vulnerabilities, such as in South Korea, where a plan was approved only to be disbanded following an election result three months later.

Finally, Joana Silvestrin Zanon presented details about the *Outline Development Plan for the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area*. The work had been conducted in collaboration with Virginia Elisabeta Etges. The Outline Development Plan is a Chinese government policy document part of the Belt and Road initiative where the Greater Bay Area is seen as a driving force for internationalisation. The region combines the socialist and capitalist systems. Although Chinese policy aims for equity over competitiveness, the Outline Development Plan focuses on competitiveness, while equity is not explicitly contemplated.

These three sessions all paid attention to the past, the emergence of policy overtime, and the impact of these trajectories and orientations on future outcomes. Harrison's work was a continuation of a project on Planning Regional

Futures, while Silvestrin Zanon will be continuing her work by investigating how people in Macao feel about the proposed development plan, moving from the background and current policy to the current position and future outlook on local/regional level. Temporality is thus highlighted as a critical aspect of regional planning in terms of research and policy.