

Report 5: Adela Juntian CHEN, Session P. Developing Rural, Peripheral, Remote & Marginal Regions



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From June 11-14, 2024, the RSA Annual Conference convened at the University of Florence, gathering experts, scholars, policymakers, and practitioners worldwide to explore global regional development under the theme “Global Challenges, Regional Collaboration, and the Role of Places”. Within this comprehensive agenda, the session on “Developing Rural, Peripheral, Remote, and Marginal Regions” emerged as a crucial discussion point, emphasizing the development of these lagging regions, which are increasingly relevant amid global challenges such as climate change, resource allocation disparities, and economic inequality. These regions face significant obstacles, including underdeveloped infrastructure, talent outflow, and limited economic vitality, impeding their integration into the global economy and equitable development.

The session featured presentations and discussions from scholars across various

countries who addressed the development challenges and opportunities in these underdeveloped regions through the plenary conference, parallel sessions, and special sessions. In the opening ceremony, Professor Roberta Rabellotti (Università di Pavia) from Italy explored the impact of the green transition on underdeveloped and marginal regions. She emphasized strategies to leverage green opportunities and discussed policy options to support sustainable development in these regions. Her keynote speech underscored the importance of promoting regional coordination and development in less developed areas within global economic sustainability.

Following this, scholars from 14 countries, including the UK, Denmark, China, and the USA, delved deeper into these topics in the parallel session “Developing Rural, Peripheral, Remote, and Marginal Regions.” Under the guidance of session chairs Professor Jan Vang Brambini-Pedersen (Syddansk Universitet, Denmark), Dr Jack Reed (University of Exeter, UK), and Davide Madei (EURAC Research, Italy), presentations and lively Q&A sessions covered regional studies from the EU, Australia, China, and North America, highlighting common and region-specific issues in underdeveloped regions.

Several vital topics garnered extensive discussion. Professor Piotr Rosik (IGiPZ PAN) used weighted and unweighted centroids and potential accessibility models to illustrate the northeastward shift of Europe’s economic centre from 1960 to 2020, noting that GDP centroids remain in the north and west, while population centroids tend to the south. Cindy Rentrop (Technical University of Munich) compared development strategies in two peripheral German regions facing skill shortages and population decline, providing valuable insights for similar regions. Addressing the resilience of rural and peripheral regions, Professor Haifeng Qian (University of Iowa) reveals that increased interregional accessibility enhances innovation performance in these regions, particularly those with higher knowledge stock, university presence, strong manufacturing bases, and larger populations, highlighting the importance of absorptive capacity and agglomeration economics. Professor Maria da Conceição Rego (Universidade de Évora) found that migration, labour market characteristics, and local government activities are key factors influencing rural resilience in Portugal. This resilience is particularly evident in regions that can retain or attract populations despite the decline. Professor Lana Slavuj Borcic (University of Zagreb) highlighted that, despite challenges of depopulation and de-agrarianization, standard farming

practices persist in Croatia's rural peripheral areas, significantly contributing to the local economy and food systems.

Economic scholars such as Dr Bruce Wilson (European Union Centre of Excellence at RMIT), Professor Ignazio Cabras (Newcastle Business School), and Valeria Francioli (Università degli Studi di Firenze) examined case studies from Australia, the UK, and Italy. They analyzed the vital roles of micro-communities in advancing regional economic transformation, attracting investment, promoting employment, and supporting essential public services, economic growth, and population return. Additionally, the session included diverse case studies from regions such as the Arctic, China's border areas, and minority regions, enriching the discussion with varied regional perspectives.

Other notable sessions addressed the development of rural, peripheral, remote, and marginal regions, focusing on traditional topics like urban-rural cooperation, industrial cluster advancement, regional transformation, and innovative issues such as migration, ecological sustainability, and geopolitical roles.

These academic discussions captured the unique developmental needs and challenges of marginalized regions and analyzed how these areas can leverage regional collaboration and innovative strategies to unlock their development potential and achieve sustainable development goals. Scholars deepened their understanding of regional interdependence by examining case studies from various global rural, peripheral, and underdeveloped regions. They highlighted the importance of regional studies in fostering international cooperation, knowledge sharing, and technological exchange, ultimately promoting inclusive growth and prosperity worldwide. The future regional development path will undoubtedly be a sustainable journey grounded in a profound understanding of local characteristics, strengthened regional cooperation, and an active embrace of innovation and change. This direction aligns with the aims of global research and governance initiatives for developing rural, peripheral, remote, and marginal regions. It will contribute to global governance as advocated by this year's RSA Conference theme.

About the Author

Adela Juntian CHEN is a PhD student at the School of International Relations, Sichuan University, China. Her primary research focus is on the urban system in

China's border regions, and she has published articles in leading Chinese academic journals. Specifically, within the field of regional studies, she concentrates on the southwestern border areas of China. Her research delves into how the construction of multi-level urban systems influences the development and modernization governance of border regions within the context of China's new urbanization strategy. At the 2024 RSA Annual Conference, Adela presented her mid-term PhD research findings as a recipient of the Conference Bursary, highlighting new insights obtained through fieldwork and on-site interviews.