

# Reflection on the 2019 RSA Europe Socio-Spatial Dynamics Summer College



*By Dr. Jason C Wong, LSE Fellow in Environmental Economics at the London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

This year's RSA Summer College took place in the beautiful Cagliari in Sardinia, Italy. As an early career researcher, I was foremost glad to meet other motivated scholars from around the world and from different disciplinary orientations who work on similar questions related to skills, mobility, and entrepreneurship. This is my first time at an RSA Summer College or Conference, and I immediately felt a strong sense of community. In addition to the new knowledge and research ideas, I will be bringing home with me new friendships and a wonderful network.

Over the course of one week, the Summer College speakers and participants

engaged in multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary exchanges on topics spanning labor mobility, development history and policies, migration, path dependence, and innovation. Perspectives from qualitative and quantitative research were presented, with new insights from both historical and contemporary research. My personal highlight was the research presentation session. The Summer College organizers thoughtfully grouped us with different senior scholars, and the participants presented, discussed, and critiqued each other's work with the mentorship and facilitation of the instructor. Everyone in my group received helpful feedback for our research work. I learned a lot in that session particularly with respect to methodology and data, and I think we even formed potential collaborations for future work!

The Summer College speakers were unique in that the majority of the speakers participated throughout the school, leading to fruitful (albeit sometimes tense (!)) exchanges between scholars, and enabled participants to engage more deeply with the speakers throughout the week and form better connections. These conversations - whether it was during lunch under the Sardinian sun or on the tour bus during our site visits - highlighted the unresolved questions on the research frontier and conflicts in our research fields.

Another high point of my week was the site visit to the Saline Conti Vecchi - salt works in Cagliari. Host and Dean Prof. Stefano Usai told us much about the history of the Sardinian economy before we embarked upon our trip. The spectacular historical site was a living museum for us to learn about regional development over time in a region - embodying a story of growth, decline and revitalization, which gave us regional researchers many fruits for thought.

Though met with perhaps mixed reviews, I was also intrigued by the Creativity Lab on the university campus. The speakers presented an interesting case of how the University of Cagliari is taking an active role in fostering an innovation economy and stimulating their students through creative thinking courses and boot camps. Participants then learned about the process of creativity through a simulated contest that highlighted the ingredients, constraints, and environment necessary for innovation and entrepreneurship. Each team had different constraints and conditions (such as imposed structures or time pressure) in producing a final product pitch to enter a hypothetical science conference. The activity certainly gave me things to think about in terms of my own pedagogical development and how I could potentially include creative problem solving in my

own teaching of regional economics and sustainable development.

Overall, the Summer College was a stimulating experience, through which I met many scholars doing research on skills and innovation. We still know so little about entrepreneurship and we have much to learn. I was left with several questions, such as can innovation/creativity be encouraged or induced artificially or deliberately? Or are the environments for organic development more important? And is the capacity to innovate or to be entrepreneurial inherently path dependent and embeds issues of inequality? Are we measuring the right thing when we speak of innovation and entrepreneurship? This was certainly a recommended experience for early career researchers who have multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary orientations in their research.