

Report on Regions in Recovery e-Festival 2022: NoRSA Special sessions: Regional industrial restructuring and new path development - assets, agency, and policy



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This year, on a state-of-the-art e-platform and with innovative socializing e-rooms, RSA Festival successfully celebrated once more the added value regions bring to national and global socio-cultural and economic growth. As such, the organising team facilitated an update on trending theories, analyses and debates informing regional growth policies worldwide.

In deconstructing geopolitical discourses and relating their impact to territorial inequalities, the Festival's plenary sessions reinforced a conceptual and empirical framework for subsequent research questions. On the one hand, by zooming in on spatial distribution of resources and their place in multilevel governance strategies and sustainable development goals (SDGs), the debate centred around

sustainability, infrastructure, social/human capital, and communitarian wellbeing. On the other hand, by zooming out on the discussion, the bigger picture focalised this dual dimension (sustainability resource use/regional cultural identities and multilevel governance) through strategic regionalism. Here, envisioned constructions of the everyday (intriguingly and innovatively argued in the Opening Plenary) mirrored in multiple facets of capitalism, regionally informed by territorial inequalities (structurally emphasized in the EU plenary's debate led by John Bachtler and Lewis Dijkstra). Such a context already ignited lines of thought towards the evolution, analytical methods, and integration of a socio-cultural dimension in sustainable regional policies while searching for new regional, strategic, resource-designed horizons in capitalism.

Following the economic geography path, NoRSA's transformative, mixed-methods research setting (moderated and guided by Roman Martin & Marte Solheim) provided the audience with a three-fold scientific discussion.

Firstly, it was interesting to see how firm strategies refocus our understanding of the basic needs-resources (assets) relationship in times of crises. On the one hand, listening to Jan Ole Rypestol, we learn that, in local economies, international firms gravitate towards asset preservation, while the human factor seems to be replaceable. On the other hand, looking into Spanish local economies (Simon Sanchez-Moral), when confronted with absence of basic resources (health), formal institutional standards reorganise; a process which gives space for entrepreneurship or diversification. Thus, I am wondering: are the structures of various global sectors related to basic-needs-resources sustainable (adequate firm size and resilience levels)? Is there a need for redefining intra-sectoral linkages through global cohesive policies in international trade in which both human capital and material resources are equally valuable?

Secondly, the issues related to the redistribution of human capital in transition sectors (Ben Vermeulen) and the occupational relatedness leading to higher-end functions in firms (Jason Deegan) gravitate previously related questions of firm level resilience strategies towards the need for refocusing the knowledge role of human capital in preventing local brain drain and unemployment. This reflects even further when considering the encompassing study on technological diffusion (presented by Tom Broekel) and its connection to different types of proximity in capitalising on the fact that complex technologies seem to diffuse faster.

Thirdly, going back to the original economic thoughts relating firms to social capital, the debates on the roles of local culture (Maximilian Brenner and Hanna Martin), actors and ecosystems for local growth (Jakob Eder, Francesco Tassi,

Dayne Walling, Carmen Sillero Illanes, Seija Virkkala) frame the previous discussion in a spatially 'scalar' (Dayne Walling) framework. The overall picture drawn here was also engaging. By observing how firms restructure around the need of (Hanna Martin) or from local culture (Maximilian Brenner), local identity seems to be a structurally overlooked competitive advantage which never fails to give results. Later, mass, agglomeration economies and key knowledge institutions are shown to be only partial ingredients to a winning recipe (Jakob Eder, Francesco Tassi). Complementary presentations unveiled how strategic agency levels and diverse actors in local ecosystems, intra-regionally equally distributed specialised policy agendas and adequate capacity (Carmen Sillero Illanes, Dayne Walling, Seija Virkkala) seem to be the key link for resilient and sustainable local growth, regional industrial transition and smart specialisation. The approach of the session series brought core issues to the front and related to other stimulating sessions such as the one chaired by Robert Hassink (with all its knowledgeable contributors) on regional industrial dynamics in a decarbonising world. Overall, it was interesting for me to follow the intensive debates on how infrastructure and technology, skills and human capital, sectoral knowledge, and regional-local actors recombine and reinvent agency in policy-business-academic triangles.