# Report on Research Network on 'Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability'



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The Research Network on '**Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability'** lasted formally from 2016-2019 but was graciously extended to 2020 after the unexpected death of Tassilo Herrschel (1958-2019). Dr Herrschel was the network's most important 'animator' and a well-known participant in the Regional Studies Association for many years. As originally conceived, especially by Dr Herrschel, the network aimed to explore the diverse conceptual meanings and empirical practices of 'smartness' across various economic and cultural regions of the world. The network thus attempted to connect growing work on "smart cities," for example, with innovative and creative urban and regional policy making, where different understandings and practical approaches to "smartness" were – and remain – empirically important in shaping individual initiatives, development projects, and strategic rationales.

The intellectual brainchild of Dr Herrschel (Westminster), who passed away at the

very *denouement* of the research, as well as Bas van Huer (Vrije Universiteit Brussel), the network was managed mostly by Gerd Lintz (Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development-Dresden,) and to a lesser extent by Yonn Dierwechter (University of Washington, Tacoma).  The network also received crucial assistance and intellectual support from Iwona Sagan (University of Gdansk) and Stefano Di Vita (Polytechnic University of Milan). Igor Calzada (Oxford) provided signature contributions throughout the network, including major work to co-organize the second seminar on data/information smartness. This forged useful connections between the RSA and the Urban Transformations programme at Oxford that was funded originally by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Calzada also forged other connections with the EU funded project, H2020-Smart Cities and Communities.

After its inauguration at the RSA North American conference held in Atlanta in 2016, the network held four major research seminars, each focused squarely on one of the original research themes:

- Event 1: Experimental Smartness, October 2016, Dresden (IOER, Gerd Lintz)
- Event 2: Data/Information Smartness, November 2016, Brussels (Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Bas van Heur; Urban Transformations programme-Oxford, Igor Calzada)
- Event 3: Spatial Smartness, September 2017, Gdansk (University of Gdansk, Iwona Sagan)
- Event 4: Institutional Smartness, July 2018, Malmö (Region Skåne, P. Tallberg)

At Dresden, as just one example of the intellectual debates at these seminars, the keynote speeches and presentations showed the thirty-three participants from ten countries – Canada, France, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, the UK, and the USA – that smartness is used today in ways that now go well beyond both "smart growth" and "smart cities," respectively.  For some, this expansion meant that we should now avoid using the language of smartness altogether. For others, however, the more encompassing notion of "smartness" might still invite scholars and practitioners to consider productively what is desirable and possible in city-regional governance heading into the 2020s, especially with respect to sustainability values and tensions with economic competitiveness.

Largely though the work of Stefano Di Vita, several RSA network participants also connected with faculty at the Polytechnic University of Milan, notably through two initiatives: the international seminar "Digital Services for an Internet of Places Networks and Nodes for a Smart Region Between Milan and Turin" (May 2016) and "Outcomes of Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability" at the international seminar "The Geographies of Disruptions: Which Conflicts and Questions for Urban and Regional Agendas? in the cycle "About Urban Innovation: Place and Policy Making for Production and Consumption" in July, 2019.

Additional connections were made in July 2019 with researchers at a AESOP-Venice roundtable, "Exploring the Multi-Faceted Dimensions of Smartness: Moving from ICT to Governance and Planning for Sustainability in 'Regionalized Cities" was organized and at a smart city symposium at the University of Calgary in 2017 organised by Byron Miller.  Unfortunately, a final session of network participants seeking to consolidate network findings at the Annual RSA Conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia (2020) was cancelled due to the COVID -19 pandemic.

In addition to a planned volume,  the main research output of the network (so far) has been a co-authored book, published in 2018 with Routledge by Herrschel and Dierwechter, entitled *Smart transitions in city-regionalism: territory, politics and the quest for competitiveness and sustainability*. This book directly integrates key themes and insights from the RSA network, conceptualizing "smartness" as a series of "dual transitions," and focusing on diverse territorial outcomes in Seattle, Vancouver, Lyon, Berlin, Prague, Cape Town, and Johannesburg. The book is part of the RSA-Routledge's long-standing *Regions and Cities* series and was one of three finalists selected for the RSA's "Best Book Award" for 2018-2019.  In addition, the special issue *From Smart City to Smart Region. Meanings, Governance, Policies and Projects* was published on the scientific journal "Territorio" (vol. 83, 2017).  In the framework of the Research Network, this issue, which was edited by Stefano Di Vita, explored risks and potentials of smartness in regionalised cities against the backdrop of the recurring rhetoric and ongoing scientific debate about diffusion of ICTs in urban space. On these topics, articles by Yonn Dierwechter, Tassilo Herrschel, and Igor Calzada provide a collection of international and multidisciplinary research and case studies. Moreover, Calzada further developed work presented here (and elsewhere in the

network) into a major book published by Elsevier in 2020, *Smart City Citizenship,* which explores experimental, data-driven, and participatory processes of smart cities to help integrate ICT-related social innovation into urban life.



Figure 1.  'Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability' participants debating smartness as "experimental governance" in Dresden (October 2016).

Figure 2.  'Smart City-Regional Governance for Sustainability' participants enjoy discussions of "spatial smartness" at University of Gdansk (September 2017)