

# Report on the 5th workshop of the RSA research network on Regional Economic and Policy History



*By Arno van der Zwet (University of the West of Scotland, Scotland, UK), Sara Svensson (Central European University, Hungary) and Marijn Molema (Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Netherlands)*

This fifth and final workshop of the network took place at the University of the West of Scotland in Paisley, Scotland between 29 and 30 of November 2018. This workshop examined multi-level policy implementation from an urban perspective and placed this within a historic context. The workshop was hosted by the School of Media, Culture and Society at the University of the West of Scotland in Paisley, and focused on how urban actors involved in economic development policy have responded to the changing nature of policy frameworks at the regional, national and European level over time. In total, 23 scholars and practitioners from 10

European countries attended, and included economic historians, geographers, political scientists, policy and European studies scholars and business historians.



Multi-level policy implementation has received major scholarly attention over the past three decades. In particular, European integration provided a strong impetus for the development of new levels of government which links in to the policy process at the supra-national, national, regional and local level. There is no shortage of concepts which aim to capture policy-making relations between different levels of government, but one of the most influential ones has been multi-level governance. Moreover, multi-level governance has entered the lexicon of policy-makers. In fact, it has been adopted to such an extent that integration of horizontal responsibilities of the policy-making process has become an empirical reality and an established normative paradigm.

There are some important limitations to the current literature and debates concerning multi-level governance. For one, the main concern of the multi-level governance literature are the relations between the European, national and regional levels. With some notable exceptions, the local (urban) level has received much less attention. Furthermore, most of the work provides an analysis of formal structures and relations, whereas informal multi-level relations can have a major



impact. A historical approach can be instrumental in terms of providing insights into these dimensions of multi-level governance.



What has historically been the role of the urban level in multi-level policy frameworks for urban economic development? From this perspective, in his keynote address, Professor Mike Danson explored the multi-level policy frameworks that emerged in the past in Scotland, exploring issues related to institutional change and their impact on economic development policy delivery, and provided insights in the changes of vertical relations between the different actors. A second keynote address, by Dr Christopher Huggins, focused on horizontal relation between urban authorities in cross border cooperation, emphasizing the fluctuating (non-linear) nature of this cooperation and the reliance on local actors to keep the cooperation alive in times of central government retrenchment.

Several papers in the workshop took a bottom-up perspective of multi-level governance, by focusing on the role of the local level in urban economic development. Several papers examined multi-level relations from a small-n case study perspective. A paper on Eibar in the Basque country employed the concept of resilience in order to understand long term shifts in economic structures in the town. A case study of shipyards in Amsterdam provided insights into shifts in

policy paradigms in order to understand changes in decisions at different levels of government. The void of national urban policy in Italy was regarded as a key driver for the development of urban manufacturing in Milan. Papers on Greece and Poland demonstrated the extent to which – from a bottom-up perspective – MLG approaches are linked to adapting and building capacity that change administrative cultures. A further set of papers provided a cross-country historic perspective of urban development. A case study of two urban border regions, Copenhagen/Malmö and Vienna/Bratislava explored the extent to which both could be considered as examples of collaborative governance. A comparison of Vienna, Dublin and Stockholm found limited evidence of increased levels of liberal ‘cityzens’. A broader comparison of modern transnational networks argued that these networks bear some close resemblance with loosely structured and flexible networks in the past.



A Glasgow spotlight session was introduced by Professor Chik Collins and Professor Ian Levitt, whose presentation provided insight into the complex multi-level frameworks within which Glasgow policy actors operated from the 1950s to the 1980s; in particular demonstrating the lasting effect of powerful narratives that created path dependencies and impacted economic development policy in Glasgow. Subsequently three senior policy actors provided their perspective on

both formal and informal relations. The session demonstrated the importance of understanding institutional relations in combination with the personal values of individuals that operate within the urban economic development policy community.

Overall the workshop identified a number of important themes in terms of what a historic perspective of multi-level governance can offer. First, by taking a long-term perspective, we can identify ebbs and flows in relations between and across different levels of government, rather than regarding multi-level governance as a linear process in which integration of vertical and horizontal networks is constantly increasing. Second, different levels of government employ different interpretations of historical events to underpin their current economic development policy rationales. Understanding this 'multi-level history' could offer a valuable additional analytical dimension to the multi-level governance literature. Third, a micro perspective of multi-level governance which focuses on the trends in a single urban area can offer valuable insights in terms of providing a detailed description of both formal and informal relations.

### **About the authors**

Dr Arno van der Zwet (Arno.van-der-Zwet@uws.ac.uk) is a lecturer at the University of the West of Scotland. His research interests are territorial development, territorial politics and European urban policy.



Dr. Sara Svensson is a Research Fellow at the Center for Policy Studies at Central European University. She has published several articles on institutional development in European cross-border regions.



Dr Marijn Molema is a Researcher at the Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. He specialises in 20th century History of Regional Economic Policies and is the key contact for the RSA ReHinetwork.

