

Report on the RSA Russia conference on Urban and Regional Resilience: Strategies for Success



By Leonid Limonov (ICSER “Leontief Centre”, St. Petersburg, Russia and Irina Turgel, Ural Federal University, Yekaterinburg, Russia)

The conference ‘Urban and Regional Resilience: Strategies for Success’ was organized by the Russian Division of Regional Studies Association in cooperation with International Centre for Social and Economic Research “Leontief Centre” on the 22-23th of October, 2018 in St. Petersburg, Park Inn Hotel.

The Organizing Committee of the conference included representatives of scientific organizations and universities from the UK, USA, Ireland, Germany, Russia and Poland. This is the second conference held by the Russian Division of RSA (the first one being held in St. Petersburg in 2016). An important distinctive feature of these conferences is that they are held within the framework of the All Russia Strategic Planning Forum of regions and cities – the largest Russian

discussion platform that unites Russian and international experts, scientists, representatives of public authorities of federal and sub-national levels as well as representatives of many local governments of Russia. This makes it possible to expand the audience of the conference participants and actively involve practitioners in the discussions.

The conference began with welcoming speeches of Daniela Carl, Deputy Chief Executive of RSA, and the Chair of the RSA Russia Division, Leonid Limonov. Particular attention in these presentations was paid to possibilities and requirements of publishing in RSA journals, and on the different grant schemes provided by RSA for its members.

Further work was organized in sessions. In this two-day event, 36 speakers presented their reports to the audience of *circa* 50 participants.

The key issues discussed during the sessions were the following:

- Metropolitan challenge: economic development and planning
- Spatial inequalities of social and economic development
- Urban and regional resilience
- Local policies, communities and self-government
- Trade and cluster policies
- Role of cultural heritage and tourism as factors of urban and regional development
- Evaluation of regional and local policies.

The choice of the title of the conference and topics of the main sessions were inspired by a number of critical questions, reflected in current literature on regional/local development and governance:

- How can we address persistent disparities between prosperous metropolitan regions and less-favored 'peripheries', including small cities and rural settlements?
- How does centralization of political and economic power influence local and regional development, spatial inequalities, and cohesion?
- How can we reconcile the imperatives of economic development, sustainability, and human well-being?
- How do place specific institutional frameworks, cultures, and norms facilitate or hinder development?

- How do economic development strategies in post-industrial cities influence income and class disparities?

The notion of urban resilience cuts across these debates in theory and practice. At the theoretical level, it has allowed linking of debates in regional geography, urban planning, and policy studies. At the practical level, policy-makers are concerned with issues of implementation and the gap between policy design and delivery. Current debates are dominated by structural factors and explanations, but the role of agency and leadership is rising up the research agenda in regional studies, political science and management.

This raises the following questions in relation to the long-term resilience of places:

- What is the role of local, regional, and national level policies and leadership?
- What role is played by inter-budgetary relations, local self-governance, and inter-municipal cooperation?
- How effective and efficient are the following regional policy instruments: national/regional targeted programs, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), Development Corporations (DCs), Local/Regional Development Agencies, Public-Private Partnership (PPP) projects, etc.?

Current debates emphasize the role of universities in innovation, knowledge exchange, and creating human capital. These are crucial factors for regions and localities seeking to develop new areas of specialization, but how is this managed in peripheral regions and small cities which have need, but are often excluded from university-centered knowledge exchange networks? How can this mismatch be addressed? Papers were also sought on social and civil capital, and their influence on the quality of institutions and mechanisms for creating new industrial specializations, as well as city and regional resilience in the face of external shocks. Most of these and other issues of local and regional resilience were discussed during the conference.

The reports of Verena Balz, Delft University of Technology (Regional design: Discretionary Approaches to Planning in the Netherlands), Ivan Tosics, Metropolitan Research Institute (The Metropolitan Challenge in European Urban Areas), Konstantin Kholodilin, German Institute for Economic Research (on CBD

of St. Petersburg between 1869 and 2018), Oleg Golubchikov, Cardiff University (Moscow's Renovatsiya: a Return to State Urbanism?), Evgeniya Kolomak, Novosibirsk State University (Spatial Development of Contemporary Russia), Hans Wiesmeth, Ural Federal University (Innovativeness and Income Inequality in Russian Regions), Takashi Yamamoto, Takushoku University (Enhancing Economic Resilience by promoting SMEs for Shrinking Cities), Dmitry Gladyshev, Ural Federal University (Political Parties and their Candidates: an econometric analysis of regional elections), and Nadir Kinossian, Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography (Agents of Change in Peripheral Regions: a new research agenda) aroused, in our opinion, great interest from the audience and well illustrated the variety of topics discussed at the conference.

The conference was attended by participants and speakers from Australia, Czech Republic, Great Britain, Germany, Hungary, Japan, The Netherlands, Oman, Poland, Romania, as well as from different universities and research centers of Russia: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Yekaterinburg, Tomsk and Novosibirsk.

To conclude, there was a coordinated meeting of the Russian division of RSA. Leonid Limonov informed attendees about the results of the work by the Russian division in 2018: he noted the increase in the number of RSA members and participants from Russia at RSA events; also the increase in the number of events, either organized by the Russian Division independently or in the framework of bigger events, as well as of events where the presentation of RSA activities took place. The participants also noted the importance of RSA work on the development of the system of scientific publications: journals and monographs. Another significant result was the expansion of the geography of RSA participants. In particular, in 2018 at Lugano, a record number of participants from Russia attended the annual RSA conference (12 people). The participants of the meeting approved the report on the activities of the Division, re-elected Prof. Leonid Limonov as the Chair of the Russian Division and supported the proposal to hold the next conference of the Russian Division in Yekaterinburg in November 2019.

Participants' perspectives

By Iván Tosics, Metropolitan Research Institute, Budapest, Hungary

I am an urban researcher embedded in EU urban development issues, with particular interest in the transition from socialism into capitalism and in the specific conflicts of the post-socialist period.

From this perspective, the most interesting paper for me was that of Oleg Golubchikov, Cardiff University, United Kingdom and Irina Ilina, HSE, Russia: Moscow's Renovatsiya: a (re-)turn to state urbanism? The authors described the changes in the political background of the idea, and came to the statement that the potential motivation is of bureaucracy-dependant profit-seeking through concentrated interventions. This is similar to the state-led urbanism present in many western cities, with large urban projects becoming the leading aspect of urban development, with little respect for social justice. The speciality of the Russian case could be the negligence of the property rights as well - although the fight is far from being over as residents try to resist the policy.

Another interesting question was been raised by Nadir Kinossian (Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Germany) about the agents of change in peripheral regions "Agents of Change in Peripheral Regions: A new research agenda". Going beyond the statements of the New Economic Geography, which are relevant for large agglomerational economies, the question is what are the agents of change creating new development paths in the peripheries and non-metropolitan areas? The author emphasized the importance of building up new areas of specialization and mentioned innovative entrepreneurs, place leaders, collective entrepreneurship who fight the barriers to change (policy traps, institutional and organizational thinners, technological gaps). All this is an exciting new comparative research agenda for the upcoming years.

New research methods also help to understand the logic of past developments. Konstantin Kholodilin (German Institute for Economic Research) described in his paper "City centre of St. Petersburg between 1869 and 2017," the changes of the central area of St. Petersburg between 1869 and 2018 through the analysis of the spatial distribution of eating establishments. The consecutive maps from the end of the 19th century till today show clearly what the spatial consequences of the changing regulations of the different political regimes were, fluctuating between different versions of nationalizing and privatizing policies.

By Prof. Dr. Hans Wiesmeth, TU Dresden, Germany and Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg

This recent RSA Conference provided an excellent opportunity for becoming more familiar with relevant topics of regional studies in Russia, with the research projects of interest for the mostly young researchers.

My personal impression as an economist with international experience is that regional studies as an academic subject is strongly developing in Russia, but further support and encouragement from scientific organizations such as the RSA, is very welcome and, perhaps required for further raising awareness for important regional issues.

For this reason, I would like to thank the RSA and the organizers of this interesting conference, in particular Daniela Carl (RSA) and Leonid Limonov (RSA, Russian Division), for their initiative. I do hope there will be a follow-up in the years to come.