Introduction: 2023 RSA Annual Conference

By Harry Radzuan (email).

The Regional Studies Association's Annual Conference #RSA23 was our largest knowledge exchange and networking event post-COVID-19. Organised in partnership with the School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana and the Slovenian Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, the conference was held at the School of Economics and Business, University of Ljubljana. The conference brought together academics, practitioners and policymakers to exchange knowledge, experiences, views and research findings. Over four days in sunny Ljubljana, Slovenia, over 700 participants from 54 countries attended the event to discuss pressing issues in regional studies and science, regional and economic development, policy and planning, climate actions, and energy.

The conference was launched by the State Secretary, Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development and the Dean of the School of Economics and Business,

University of Ljubljana, during the welcome reception at the wonderful Ljubljana Castle atop Castle Hill above downtown Ljubljana.

The opening plenary, chaired by Sandrine Kergroach, OECD was composed by experts in green global value chains for sustainable regional development, Oliver Harman of IGC Oxford, UK, Riccardo Crescenzi of London School of Economics, UK, and Anna Hammarberg of Business Sweden.

Throughout the 202 thematic sessions and four plenaries held at the School of Economics and Business, attendees had the opportunity to share and learn from established experts and early career researchers, presenting 580 papers in total. The conference was run in a hybrid format to accommodate attendees who could not be present in person and also to support the carbon emission reduction initiative.

Besides the main knowledge-sharing and thought-provoking sessions, attendees were offered the opportunity to go on walking tours around the city of Ljubljana to witness some significant historic landmarks, including Vegova Street, Ljubljanica river embankments, Triple Bridge, Cobblers' Bridge, Central Market and Križanke Summer Theatre where I had the pleasure to visit. There were also thematic tours, such as Urban Culture and Sustainable Mobility Good Practices, where participants could choose based on their interests.

Other social programmes included sports activities, exhibitor stalls and PowerPoint Karaoke. The latter for the first time in the history of the RSA Annual Conference. Attending the RSA Conference for the first time and participating in the PowerPoint Karaoke myself, I can personally vouch for the awesomeness of the RSA Conference, not only in the high level of knowledge exchange but also the collaboration and networking opportunities and fun times provided as part of the conference.

The conference also featured a dinner at the majestic Grand Hotel Union Eurostars. It was attended by more than 360 delegates to celebrate the summer, the end of the conference, as well as the retirement of our long-standing Chief Executive, Sally Hardy.

Post-conference trips allowed delegates to stretch their legs and explore Ljubljana by bicycle, paddle boarding, or further beyond to Lake Bled, Postojna Cave and Predjama Castle.

This year, the RSA was delighted to offer conference bursaries (free conference places) to nine doctoral and early career researchers to aid them in attending the conference. Providing funding for researchers is integral in enhancing knowledge exchange and the development of networks and careers. The following sections provide insights by our conference bursary winners addressing the following themes: regional innovation and tech change; financing regional transformations; sustainable tourism; globalisation and de-globalisation; regional resilience; climate change, energy and environmental sustainability; inclusive growth; and urban and rural transformations for sustainability and resilience.

Conference photos, plenary recordings and a short conference video of the 2023 Annual Conference in Ljubljana are available at 2023 RSA Annual Conference.

The next RSA Annual Conference #RSA24 will be held 11th -14th June 2024 at the University of Florence, Italy. For more details, please go to 2024 RSA Annual Conference.

We hope you can join us in Florence for the #RSA24.

Author

This section is prepared by Dr Harry Radzuan, a Senior Tutor/Research Associate at the University of Manchester. His research interests are at the intersection of energy decarbonisation, climate change, transport, urban studies, land use, and planning. He is happy to discuss potential international collaboration. Contacts: LinkedIn page and email.