

# Urban and Rural Transformations for Sustainability and Resilience (JRC's SMARTER Conference Stream)



*By Solomiia Tkach (email).*

As a member of the Regional Studies Association, I was honoured to become one of the 2023 Annual Conference “Transforming Regions: Policies and Planning for People and Places” (Ljubljana, Slovenia) Bursary Winners. I had the opportunity to participate in this prestigious event and engage in meaningful discussions on regional transformation and the role of collaborative efforts in shaping the future of our communities.

One of the key themes highlighted throughout the conference was vital challenges and opportunities for urban and rural transformations for sustainability and resilience. The EU Commission’s Joint Research Centre’s (JRC) SMARTER

Conference Stream was especially focused on the theme. The discussions around modern urban and rural transformations brought together experts, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders from various fields to discuss strategies and initiatives to create sustainable and resilient urban and rural areas. Alessandro Rainoldi (Joint Research Centre, European Commission) made welcome and opening remarks. The session's main speakers were Flor Avelino (Utrecht University, Copernicus Institute of Sustainable Development) and Michaela Trippel (University of Vienna).

Participants discussed the role of social innovation in just sustainability transitions, with a particular focus on power dynamics. The concept of "transformational power" was considered, and the power relations change in the transition to equitable, sustainable development was shown. Participants also discussed the need for comprehensive spatial planning, integrated land use management, and the importance of preserving natural resources and green spaces within urban and rural areas, the challenges of climate change, the potential of the circular economy as a transformative approach for urban and rural areas, social inclusion and community engagement in urban and rural transformations. In general, the discussions around urban and rural transformations for sustainability and resilience provided valuable insights into the strategies and approaches needed to achieve transformative change.

Given the urgency of the issue of urban transformation for sustainability and resilience, I presented the results of my research on "Urban governance under the condition of post-war European integration of Ukraine" at the special session of the conference "Regenerative Urbanism: Strategies for Policy, Planning and Governance of Nature-Based Solutions for Urban Area Development". Ukraine has chosen a European integration course of development. In the post-war period, Ukrainian cities faced multiple challenges. Evidently, they must regain their role and importance as incubators for innovative, climate-friendly, socially inclusive urban development. In these conditions, urban governance will lead to the recovery of Ukrainian cities. Given this, the purpose of the study was to substantiate the directions of improving urban management in Ukraine adapted to the conditions of post-war recovery and based on the experience of European countries. Hence, this study aimed to identify urban governance needs because of existing problems and challenges of the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian cities and opportunities for its improvement based on the best European

practices.

As a bursary winner, my participation in the 2023 Annual Conference proved to be an invaluable experience. The conference successfully emphasised the importance of collaboration and participation in shaping sustainable regional development.

The conference catalysed generating innovative ideas and forging partnerships by facilitating knowledge sharing, fostering networking opportunities, and promoting engagement. The discussions and insights gained will undoubtedly influence my future work, as I aim to contribute to the transformation of regions by adopting collaborative and participatory approaches.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to the organisers for allowing me to participate in such a remarkable event. I look forward to implementing the knowledge and connections gained from the conference to impact Ukrainian regions positively.

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 11<sup>th</sup> -14<sup>th</sup> 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

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