COMMISSIONER'S SEMINAR SERIES ON COHESION POLICY

The purpose of these seminars is firstly, to signal the Commission's desire to encourage growth in the number of researchers working on Cohesion Policy and related topics to build a greater pool of expertise. Secondly, to give the opportunity for relationship building between participants and policymakers to allow sharing of understanding and to refresh the expertise from which the Commission pulls in formulating and implementing policy. Finally, it offers the early career participants the opportunity to gain important and influential, high-level policy related feedback on their research.

This seminar series is an initiative by Dr Elisa Ferreira, Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms and a collaborative venture organised between Commissioner Ferreira and her Cabinet; the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) in partnership with the Regional Studies Association's European Foundation (RSA Europe).

1st Seminar:

The geography of discontent, levelling up,

lagging regions & development trapped regions

26th September 2022, Brussels, Belgium

From Hungary and Poland to Great Britain and the United States, from Austria and the Netherlands to Germany and France, election after election, the populist vote in the developed world has been on the rise. Voters are abandoning traditional parties and turning to increasingly extreme political options that offer supposedly "easy" solutions to current problems: from a response to economic crises and COVID-19 to migration and identity conflicts.

Explanations of this phenomenon have been numerous. Many of them point to the rising discontent among ever-widening layers of the population against a system that they consider to be of no benefit to them. In particular, the growth of territorial inequality within countries and long-term economic and/or demographic decline in many areas that until not that long ago were motors of economic dynamism is considered to have fuelled this discontent. Many discontented regions are those that in recent years have fallen into a development trap. The citizens of these regions —whose prosperity has not improved relative to the past and the prevailing economic conditions in national and international markets— feel neglected and abandoned by governments and policies that often pay lip service to generate more investment and levelling up, but that frequently fail to deliver on their promise. However, inequality and long-term decline are not the only explanations when it

comes to identifying the causes of discontent. Cultural or identity factors have also played a non-negligible role as drivers of the rise of political resentment.

This seminar focussed on what explains the increase in discontent among the population, reflected in a greater populist and anti-system vote. It provided a comprehensive exploration of the growth of anti-system voting in much of the developed world and on the reasons that are behind phenomena such as the rise of populism and Euroscepticism in the European Union, why Brexit took place, or why Donald Trump was elected President of the United States.

The seminar took place on 26th September 2022 in Brussels and brought together 15 PhD and early career researchers representing 11 different nations and a variety of subject areas. The academic lead was Prof Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, Princesa de Asturias Professor & Professor of Economic Geography, Director, Cañada Blanch Centre, Department of Geography and Environment, London School of Economics, UK.

SEMINAR PROGRAMME

26th September 2022, MERO ROOM 00/115 & MERO ROOM 00/108 at the ground floor in DG REGIO premises, Cours Saint-Michel 23, 1040 Bruxelles

14:00- 14:30 Short pre- seminar briefing and networking

14:30 - 15:00 Coffee/ tea, networking

15:00 - 15:20 The work of the Directorate-General Regional and Urban Policy – Lewis Dijkstra, Head of the Economic Analysis Sector in DG Regio

15:30 - 17:30 Commissioner's seminar: The geography of discontent, levelling up, lagging regions, development trapped regions

Theme 1 - Discontent and Stagnation

1. The Rise of Populism and Left-Behind Places - Fatih Cure, Newcastle University, UK

2. Subjective social status in places that don't matter: Geographical inequalities in France and Germany - Nathalie Vigna, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

3. Community-oriented approaches: a possible path to transformational change in discontented geographies - Miriam de Oliveira Gonçalves, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

4. Do strong and weak regions agree on which regions deserve support? A survey experiment on public attitudes towards reducing regional inequalities - Jan Gniza, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany

Reactions by Commissioner Ferreira and discussion

Theme 2 - Levelling up: Strategies and Opportunities for Regional Development

5. Greening at the periphery: an analysis of geography, technology and markets across EU regions - Milad Abbasiharofteh, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

6. Shaping regional energy futures: research and innovation strategies for regions in transition - Liliana Maria de Almeida Fonseca, University of Strathclyde, UK

7. Regional Development through Wellbeing: A holistic approach to levelling up? - Robert Bowen, Cardiff University, UK

Reaction by Commissioner Ferreira and discussion

Intervention by Andrés Rodríguez-Pose

17:30 End of Seminar

Return to the hotel for overnight stay/ return journey

Participants' Feedback:

This was such a valuable event. It is rare for academics or researchers of any level to be able to engage with policymakers in this way, but this seminar was extremely valuable to early career researchers in meeting the Commissioner and other associates from the European Commission, as well as having the opportunity to present and discuss research with them. Furthermore, the ability to engage and network with other early career researchers is very valuable in exploring new research ideas and building good research relationships. The event was extremely well organised, and this is typical of the work of the Regional Studies Association/ RSA Europe in ensuring that the regional studies community thrives. Dr Robert Bowen, ECR, Cardiff University, UK

I had the opportunity to challenge myself and learn how to communicate my research outside the academic world. Nathalie Vigna, PhD student, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

The seminar was absolutely fantastic and has taken me to a new level. Once you've given a talk for so many important people, other talks feel almost playfully easy. Because of the seminar, I keep asking myself if my work has a clear message with a call-to-action. It's challenging, but it adds new value to my research. Jan Gniza, PhD student, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany

ABSTRACTS

Theme 1 - Discontent and Stagnation

The Rise of Populism and Left-Behind Places
Fatih Cure, Newcastle University, UK

Rising inequalities in the new millennium are worsened by the impact of the 2008 financial crisis in the previous decade and now by the covid pandemic. This period is also marked as the rise of populism in the world. Especially, in the Europe, the number of voting for populist parties in national election has risen from 7% to more than 25% between 1998 and 2018. While studies to understand this populist backlash have focused on cultural and economic causes, some academics have developed the concept of left behind regions in relation to spatial inequalities. In order to understand and explain the left behind regions deeply, this research focuses on old industrial regions in the UK and Germany. Also, the research shows old industrial regions which have seen better times and experienced de-industrialization and prolonged economic decline overlap with places expressing populist politics. In this context, this project addresses a key gap and explores populist surge at the regional scale. The overall aim of the research is to show the relationship between the left-behind feeling of old industrial regions with rising regional disparities and rising populist movements; and to understand and explain the emergence of different forms of populism and their causes by examining how populism is variegated across different geographies. For this purpose, the analysis to be conducted at the regional scale will examine whether there is a relationship between left-behindness and populism, and will present an understanding beyond the individual dimension and the national dimension. In order to fulfil this aim, the project focuses on how variegations of populism at the regional level emerge and differ; and aim to uncover and compare these processes.

Subjective social status in places that don't matter: Geographical inequalities in France and Germany

Nathalie Vigna, University of Lausanne, Switzerland

In recent decades, the rise of the service economy and the growing attractiveness of large cities have created new social inequalities within countries, which have been seen as a source of resentment for people living in the "places that don't matter". We study spatial inequalities in terms of subjective social status using a measure of the place in the social hierarchy that individuals believe they occupy in France (1999-2017) and Germany (1992-2021) on the basis of data from the International Social Survey Program. In France we find important and persistent inequalities between urban and rural areas, as well as between the capital region and all the other regions, partially mediated by income differences. However, the time trend does not show any consistent increase in the geographical differences in subjective status apart from a possible relatively negative trend in rural areas from 2006 to 2010 and in rural places and the outskirts of large cities after 2013 compared to large cities. In Germany, our analysis shows weak differences in subjective social status between urban and rural areas but large inequalities between the West and East. While this gap is still relevant today, it has partially decreased over the past decades.

Community-oriented approaches: a possible path to transformational change in discontented geographies

Miriam de Oliveira Gonçalves, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Alongside spatial planning paradigm shifts—turn to strategic spatial planning; rise of the governance paradigm; shift from government to governance; convergence between spatial planning and regional development approaches; emergence of soft spaces and soft planning—the participation, community empowerment and capacity-building have gained increasing relevance. Successful spatial planning requires the involvement of civil society, and new forms of co-creation. With this in mind, the EU has been fostering initiatives by means of the Cohesion Policy, to encourage innovative local governance practices. Arguably, community-oriented approaches, among them the EU instrument Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) can have two aspects: on the one hand they can be seen as an instrument to mitigate the ever-widening population discontentment in relation to political institutions in various scales—municipal, regional, state and supranational—by giving the community members the experience of being in the driver seat of the delivering of funds. On the other hand, they can have a more comprehensive approach, by not tackling discontentment in a superficial way, but in a holistic long-term strategy, being capable of bringing the so called 'soft outputs': social inclusiveness, sociospatial justice, empowerment, and capacity building, and on a hopeful note, societal change. Therefore, the investigation and understanding of the dynamics inside this local governance arrangement, this polity responsible for the strategies in the territory seems paramount. Its organization and liaison strategy with the community certainly dictates the success or failure in the achievement of both goals. Their intersectionality provides the possibility of a variety of interactions and local development projects designed in a co-creative process. Their impact can be potentialized if they challenge existent structural power relations, enabling access to opportunities and giving an actual voice to the marginalized or excluded community members.

Do strong and weak regions agree on which regions deserve support? A survey experiment on public attitudes towards reducing regional inequalities

Jan Gniza, Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU), Germany

Although regional inequality is increasingly seen as a risk for lasting economic growth, political stability, and social cohesion, only few studies examine public attitudes towards policy measures aiming to reduce these inequalities. This study investigates experimentally those characteristics of a recipient region that explain public acceptance of financial transfers to eligible regions. Here, I focus on how respondents from economically strong (n=780) and weak West German regions (n=777) use different criteria for their judgements. I classified strong and weak according to Dauth and Suedekum (2015) who assigned West German districts (Landkreise and independent cities) to groups of growing and declining regions by job growth rates from 1978-2008. Using a factorial survey, respondents evaluated a hypothetical regional policy program where the characteristics of eligible recipient regions varied by tax revenue per resident, conditions of the public infrastructure, economic growth potential, impacts of past global trends and political dissatisfaction of the inhabitants. The results show that respondents from weak and strong regions agree on the fundamental deservingness aspects need and responsibility for this need. Strong regions accept regional transfers also out of a motive to insure against

economic decline and political dissatisfaction whereas weak regions want to unleash perceived potentials in regions lagging behind. These motives support regional policies like financial equalization schemes that have an insuring effect for regions and policies that combine support for lagged regions with a long-term regional branding strategy.

Theme 2 - Levelling up: Strategies and Opportunities for Regional Development

Greening at the periphery: an analysis of geography, technology and markets across EU regions
Milad Abbasiharofteh, University of Groningen, The Netherlands

A recent literature suggests that greening might represent a window of opportunity for peripheral and latecomer regions. Yet, it remains unclear what types of greening opportunities emerge at the periphery, as most studies so far have focused on greening of selected technologies/industries. Scholars have suggested that the process of green regional development entails two important dimensions: production and application. The application side has been somehow neglected. Against this background, our study seeks to analyze the EU patterns of regional greening, considering both technological opportunities and actual market applications. We aim at revealing the green technologies and products where peripheral regions specialize in. Following a novel approach of combining European patent and trademark data (1996-2020), we use Natural Language Processing (NLP) methods to identify green patents and trademarks. Next, we focus on whether EU peripheral regions specialize in green technologies and products that are themselves at the periphery of the technological and product space, hence occupying specific niches rather than central positions. More central positions come with more opportunities for further branching in additional green activities, yet niche specializations might respond to the specific regional needs or support national priorities. Our study can contribute a richer understanding of the green opportunities for EU peripheral regions, with relevance for both policymakers and scholars. The insights extend current evolutionary economic geography efforts towards a more comprehensive take on green opportunities (covering both technology and products) as well as a more systematic mapping of general greening patterns (beyond selected case studies).

Shaping regional energy futures: research and innovation strategies for regions in transition
Liliana Maria de Almeida Fonseca, University of Strathclyde, UK

Policies and investments in research and innovation (R&I) in Europe are moving beyond the innovative processes and outcomes, towards social and environmentally-conscious and mission oriented transformative and systemic change of local and regional territories. This is evident in the regional delivery of the European Green Deal, the recovery programme from the coronavirus pandemic and in the emerging discourse and framework of Sustainable Smart Specialisation Strategies (S4+). These policy developments strongly resonate in the energy transition. There is an increasing need to reposition regional industrial and energy landscapes in new, less fossil-fuel reliant, energy markets, especially for less developed and peripheral regions that have often relied on these industries for economic growth. Accounting for future industrial visioning and socio-economic realities, this paper proposes to combine regional economic development research with the social practices and relational understandings of space that underlie the lived realities of transition. It is based on the work of the H2020-funded TRACER project, which supports nine coal-intensive regions in Europe to (re-)design R&I strategies to facilitate their transition towards a sustainable energy system. The paper explores the socio-economic and political context of the energy transition in the TRACER regions by highlighting emerging results of the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP), a key smart specialisation mechanism to stimulate regional stakeholder involvement and concentrate their resources and competencies to support regional growth. Interview data with local government bodies, industry, educational organisations, and civil society, provide a detailed account of the challenges and opportunities around the energy transition in these regions. Findings show that while regional innovation and decarbonisation initiatives made efforts to support a systemic and integrated transition, challenges remain for peripheral and less developed regions. The importance of socio-economic histories and practices that underlie the socio-spatial outcomes of the transition towards sustainable energy systems are highlighted.

Regional Development through Wellbeing: A holistic approach to levelling up?

Robert Bowen, Cardiff University, UK

This research aims to critically evaluate wellbeing as an approach to regional development. This is seen in the context of the Swansea Bay city region in southwest Wales, one of the poorest areas in the UK and Northern Europe. The UK has the largest disparity between its richest and poorest regions in Europe. This has led to the development of city regions policies over the last decade, in which funding and power have been given to primary and secondary cities across the UK to engage in regional development activities. Furthermore, more recent discussions in the UK have pointed to the need to 'level up' as a way of boosting the economy in lagging areas. The focus of this research on southwest Wales is significant as one of the poorest regions, and underlines the complexities of policymaking in this way, as the region has been created around a post-industrial regional city with a large peripheral hinterland. The case study at the heart of the research, made up of 12 interviews, investigates the way in which regional development is underpinned by wellbeing, particularly the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which applies seven wellbeing principles to decision-making in Wales. Wellbeing is increasingly recognised as an important aspect in the functioning of local economies, as it places greater emphasis on social and environmental sustainability, which are important aspects for consideration given existing cost of living and climate change crises. Through a focus on the seven principles of prosperity, resilience, equality, health, cohesive communities, vibrant culture and global responsibility, the case study points to ways in which the local entrepreneurial ecosystem can engage with a wide variety of stakeholders to ensure that local issues can be raised, discussed and problematised, to identify suitable solutions in supporting local businesses and the local economy.