



Special Session Proposal

Justifications and objectives of regional policy under new circumstances: Policy, politics and trade-offs

Proposal by Ugo Fratesi (Politecnico di Milano).

ugo.fratesi@polimi.it

Abstract

Format

This session is proposed with a specific format and is proposed to be by invitation only. If the proposal is accepted, I am going to invite some trusted colleagues which generally attend the ERSA conference to have an open-minded discussion on the topic described below.

This discussion should have the form of a roundtable, which I am going to organize and coordinate.

I plan to have 5-6 interventions in the time-span of a session, without actual research papers to ensure a lively debate (at least at this stage).

Topic

The purpose of the proposal is to discuss the justifications for and the objectives of regional policy under the new circumstances we are living.

Indeed, the reasons why regional policy should be applied have been investigated for a long time but the current global and regional situation is making some of them obsolete and new ones appearing or gaining ground.

The first attempts in the 1960s and 1970s saw regional policy to be mostly justified by market failures and pursuing various objectives such as equity and efficiency (which have been at the core of policies in the following years) and quality of life and environmental protection (which we see as more recent objectives but are not really as such).

One of the main issues with regional policy has been, thereafter, whether there are trade-offs arising between its possibly conflicting objectives, and in particular between equity (or disparities) and efficiency (or growth).

The success of the concept of place-based policies, has provided ground to the idea that by tapping the untapped potentials of lagging regions the two objectives could be achieved at the same time.

Likewise, smart specialisation strategies, which have been widely applied in the EU in the 2014-20 programming period have the intent of achieving the two objectives at the same time by finding opportunities for every region.

Yet, there seems that disparities have been on the rise in the last years, and this is due to centripetal processes and the crisis of many lagging regions.

The most recent circumstances put forward additional challenges for regional policy. On one hand, the economic crisis which arose from covid-19 outbreak generates an additional need for growth. On the other, political discontent and turmoil has been increasing, especially in left-behind places. Finally, the risks of global warming have put forward the need of a green agenda, which it is however to made compatible with other objectives.

The discussion will hence address the issue of which objectives we should target with regional policy in the next years, which other objectives are better to be targeted at a national or international level and, last but not least, which trade-offs we are going to face and how can we deal with them in the best way, without neglecting them.