



Special Session Proposal

Regional Resilience in Low-density Territories: overcoming the effects of COVID-19 pandemic

Ana Dias Daniel, GOVCOPP, Universidade de Aveiro, Portugal
João José Ferreira, NECE, Universidade da Beira Interior, Portugal

Abstract

Regional inequality is a topic that has gained considerable political and public interest during the last decades, since “to promote (...) [European] overall harmonious development, the Union shall develop and pursue its actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, the Union shall aim at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions” (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Article 174). In fact, through the implementation of the European Union’s (EU) cohesion policy, countries’ disparities have been decreasing when considering the EU as a whole. Yet, it is possible to identify disparities across regions when looking within countries, where richer and core regions grow faster than poorer and more peripheral ones (Ferreira et al., 2018). This is the case in several European countries, where the capital region (the region where the country’s capital is located) is over-performing and registers a higher income level when compared to the country’s average.

According to Kühn (2015, p. 367), “the downside of these centralization dynamics, however, is that a growing number of towns and regions are increasingly left behind”. Such underdeveloped regions have been addressed in the literature almost indistinctly through different terms, such as lagging, border, rural, peripheral, and low-density, and it refers to rural or marginal regions, like smaller/dispersed urban areas, towns, and areas of low-density population (Xu & Dobson, 2019). Despite the different terminology, those territories are usually less innovative, show lower technological dynamism, suffer from population decline, ageing and youth migration, as well as the lack of highly skilled staff, and technological infrastructures, which limit the development of existing businesses and the establishment of new ones (Copus, Skuras, & Tsegenidi, 2008; Fernandes, 2019; OECD, 2018). Moreover, **those regions are less resilient than developed regions** (Lapuh, 2018), in the sense that they have less capacity to withstand or recover from the market, social and environmental shocks to continue their development growth path (Martin & Sunley, 2020). This ability is especially relevant in the current context of the crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic that affected worldwide economies and has unforeseen impacts on local communities. **Thus, this special session aims to promote the discussion about promoting the development of low-density territories (LDTs) in the context of the current economic and social crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.** Among the possible topics and questions that can be covered, the following topics are proposed:

- Impact of local dynamics and stakeholders on local resilience;
- Impact of regional and national policies on local resilience and development, in the context of LDTs;
- Relationship between local entrepreneurship ecosystem characteristics and regional/local resilience;
- Cross-regional and cross-country comparisons, as well as longitudinal studies, to assess the determinants of territorial resilience;

- Role of community-led initiatives in fostering regional/local resilience during and after a shock, as well as the community involvement and commitment to improving the 'initial conditions' of a region;
- Role of anchor companies or sectors in promoting regional/local resilience;

Finally, it is crucial to continue the theoretical and empirical debate on why and how some places react and adapt better to shocks than others, given its extensive implication on regions' development and people's lives.

References

- Copus, A., Skuras, D., & Tseggenidi, K. (2008). Innovation and peripherality: An empirical comparative study of SMEs in six European Union member countries. *Economic Geography*, *84*(1), 51–82. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-8287.2008.tb00391.x>
- Fernandes, G. P. (2019). Rural depopulation, social resilience and context costs in the border municipalities of central Portugal. Dichotomies of social reorganization vs absence of public policies. *Economia Agraria y Recursos Naturales*, *19*(1), 121–149. <https://doi.org/10.7201/earn.2019.01.07>
- Ferreira, J. J., Carayannis, E. G., Campbell, D. F. J., Farinha, L., Smith, H. L., & Bagchi-Sen, S. (2018). Geography & Entrepreneurship: Managing Growth and Change. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, *9*(2), 500–505. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-017-0514-9>
- Kühn, M. (2015). Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies*, *23*(2), 367–378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.862518>
- Lapuh, L. (2018). Socio-economic characteristics of resilient localities - Experiences from Slovenia. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, *5*(1), 149–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2018.1459202>
- Martin, R., & Sunley, P. (2020). Regional economic resilience: evolution and evaluation. In G. Bristow & A. Healy (Eds.), *Handbook on Regional Economic Resilience* (pp. 10–35). <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781785360862.00007>
- OECD. (2018). Rural 3.0 - A framework for rural development. In *Policy Note*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/urban-rural-and-regional-development/oecd-regional-outlook-2016/rural-policy-3-0_9789264260245-7-en
- Xu, Z., & Dobson, S. (2019). Challenges of building entrepreneurial ecosystems in peripheral places. *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, *8*(3), 408–430. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEPP-03-2019-0023>