

**Report on the inaugural workshop of the  
RSA Research Network on Regional Economic and Policy History  
'Interdisciplinary connections between History & Regional Studies'**

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**Barlett School of Planning, London, UK**

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Dr Marijn Molema is researcher at the Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences. He specializes in 20th century history of regional economic policies and is the key contact name for the RSA ReHi-network



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The past plays a crucial role in understanding, developing and implementing regional economic development policies. First, 'history' signifies the role played by institutional and cultural legacies, or 'path dependencies', that inform choices between different policy options. In that respect history becomes crucial to our understanding of concepts e.g. such as 'resilience'. Second, history therefore also informs us of past failures but also successes of policy instruments. These past failures and successes do not necessarily provide a blue print for the future but historical approaches do allow us to reflect on the specific context in which they were implemented.

As part of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Regional Studies Association, the RSA launched the Research Network on Regional Economic and Policy History (ReHi). Its function is to connect social scientists and historians within the field of regional research, with the aim to facilitate a deeper understanding of the roles played by history to regional research in general, and to regional policy-making specifically.

The new network hosted an inaugural workshop in London 25-26<sup>th</sup> April 2017, with a focus on 'stock-taking' of the connections that already exist between history and regional studies, and to explore existing points of contact between historians and social scientists involved in regional studies, including geographers, political scientists, and sociologists. The two days were divided into the guiding themes of ideas, methodologies and case studies, with four panels exploring theory, conceptual developments, variations in measurements and regional policies.

At the beginning of the workshop, James Hopkins (Manchester) gave an historical overview of the society that 'gives voice' to the study of regional development in general: the Regional Studies Association. In the first decades after its foundation in 1965, the society had a very active stance towards regional policy in the UK – thus inspiring the ambitions of the new ReHi-network. Likewise inspiring was the presentation of Michael Hebbert (UCL) on Peter Hall, one of the RSA's founders. The RSA's Deputy Chief Executive Daniela Carl then gave an address about the Regional Studies Association nowadays, focussing on the organisation's international expansion and its relationship with European institutions.

A key note lecture was provided by local host John Tomaney (UCL), who began with a theoretical search for common ground between historians and regional studies. He gave an overview of four historical perspectives that are already present within regional studies, and emphasized the need for comparative research in order to scrutinize mechanisms and processes that shape regional development in different spatial contexts. Joan R. Rosés (LSE) focused in his key note lecture on long-term economic development in regions, arguing that quantitative methodologies provide an important point of contact between historians and scholars from regional studies. The workshop then broadened into a range of individual papers pertaining to regional development in countries such as the UK, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Poland, Scotland and the Netherlands. It involved a varied group of researchers, including notably several PhD students.

Emil Evenhuis (Cambridge) & Andy Pike (Newcastle), for example, showed where evolutionary economic geography meets comparative historical analysis by developing a comparative case study methodology to research the adaptive resilience of cities. Robert Huggins (Cardiff) & Piers Thompson (Nottingham) showed the relationship between behavioural geography and regional economic history, especially the links between culture, psychology, agency and institutions. Stefania Fiorentino (UCL) discussed the transition from industrial districts to

new types of clusters in Italian small innovative businesses, while Tomàs Fernández-de-Sevilla (Brussel) & Joao Armando dalla Costa (Paraná, Brazil) presented a paper on the formation and growth of the Sao Paulo as an auto-industry cluster. Anna Missiaia & Kerstin Enflo (Lund) presented a fascinating case study using long-term historical data in Sweden, with their paper on regional GDP in Sweden, 1570-1850. This was followed by a study from Poland on the effects of historical borders on educational achievements by Justyna Kościńska (Warsaw). Interdisciplinary approaches were common during both days, with case studies round the history of regional policies from Glasgow (Scotland), Varese (Italy) and Leeuwarden (the Netherlands) concluding the second day.

The aim of the start meeting was to create a basic understanding of interdisciplinary connections on which can be built during the subsequent workshops. In the concluding discussion the participants established that this was very much achieved by this inaugural event. The research group clearly manages to attract scholars of the *study* of regional development and the *history* of regional development. Analytically, these are two different themes, and these concerns raise further interesting issues involving focus, time frame and methodologies. For example, the role of impact was discussed, in particular in terms of future policy, as well as the potential of wider (fruitful!) tensions between Humanities and the Social Sciences. Using the metaphor of the 'playing field' Marijn Molema (ReHi Co-ordinator) summed up the future direction of the network: only by creating this meeting space the overlapping and complementary theories, methodologies, concepts and cases can be discovered. The next two workshops will take place 29-30 June 2017 in Budapest, Hungary, and 30-31 October in Karlstad, Sweden.

More information is available here:

<http://www.regionalstudies.org/networks/network/2017-2019-regional-economic-and-policy-history>



Group photo at the workshop venue (297 Euston Road, London)

Left to right: Marica Castigliano (Delft University), Katherine Timpson (Uni. of the West of Scotland), Robert Huggins (Cardiff University); David Kingman (UCL); Ewan Gibbs (Uni. of the West of Scotland); Emil Evenhuis (Cambridge University); Sara Svensson (Central European University, Budapest), Arno van der Zwet (Uni. of the West of Scotland); Anna Missiaia (Lund University); Daniela Carl (RSA); John Tomaney (UCL); Molema (Fryske Akademy, Leeuwarden, Netherlands); James Hopkins (Manchester University); Martin Åberg (Karlstad University); Michael Hebbert (UCL); Tomàs Fernández-de-Sevilla (Free University, Brussel); Fabio Lavista (Insubria University); Silke Reeploeg (Karlstad University); Justyna Kościńska (Warsaw University); Juan Roses (LSE); Alejandro Rivero (UCL); Stefanie Fiorentino (UCL); Alan Clark (Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge); Bart Hoogeboom (Fryske Akademy); Sandrine Labory (University of Ferrara).

### **Overview of presentations in order of the program:**

John Tomaney (London): History, institutions and regional development

James Hopkins (Manchester): What can history contribute to reflections on the social and policy relevance of the Regional Studies Association?

Michael Hebbert (London): Historian, Futurologist, Regional Planner: learning from Peter Hall 1932-2014

Daniela Carl (RSA): Regional Studies Association nowadays

Emil Evenhuis (Cambridge) Evolutionary Economic Geography meets Comparative Historical (Institutional) Analysis

Robert Huggins (Cardiff): Behavioural Geography and Regional Economic History: Agency, Culture and Psychology

Stefania Fiorentino (London): Italian SMEs and innovation: old and new types of manufacturing compared. A complex history of untraded relations.

Tomàs Fernández-de-Sevilla (Brussel) & Joao Armando dalla Costa (Paraná, Brazil): The formation and growth of the Sao Paulo auto-industry cluster

Juan Rosés (London): Measuring long term regional development

Anna Missiaia (Lund): The historical roots of regional divergence: regional GDP in Sweden, 1570-1850

Justyna Kościńska (Warsaw): Persistent effects of historical partitions on educational achievements. Interdisciplinary approach

Katharine Timpson (Paisley): Explaining Glasgow's Excess Mortality: The Use of Archival Evidence on Regional Policy

Fabio Lavista (Varese): Structural policies, regional development and industrial specialisation. The Italian case (1952-2002)

Bart Hoogeboom (Leeuwarden): Changing paradigms in regional policy. The Netherlands in international perspective (1975 onwards)

Ewan Gibbs (Paisley): Making 'Modern' Scotland: Industrial Policy-Making and Application in Lanarkshire c.1940-80s