

# RSAI NEWSLETTER

THE REGIONAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL

*new series 19 - May 2020*

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## RSAI MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

All RSAI members have online access to Papers in Regional Science (PiRS) and Regional Science Policy and Practice (RSPP): journals of the Regional Science Association International. Members will need to log in to access full text articles online.

In addition to the RSAI publications, members are offered an opportunity to purchase other regional science journals at reduced rates and participate in the national and international conferences at reduced rates.

For details on how to become a member, contact the Executive Director, Andrea Caragliu at [andrea.caragliu@polimi.it](mailto:andrea.caragliu@polimi.it), or visit [www.regionalscience.org](http://www.regionalscience.org).



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## WELCOME

Greetings, Regional Scientists.

Covid-19 has presented challenges to about the entire world. Regional science is no exception. Most directly, RSAI and our sections have had to cancel many conferences including the World Congress in June, ERSA in August, WRSA/PRSCO last March, SRSA last April, among others. We have gathered virtually for now to continue intercourse in our community. To be sure, RSAI has been hard at work with many initiatives and our two journals continue to produce very high quality output.

While Covid-19 has presented personal and professional challenges to each member of our community, it has also presented opportunities. Many of us have started gathering in virtual meetings and webinars have replaced seminars. It is an interesting time to see how much, if at all, virtual meetings have replaced the networking and knowledge transfer of face-to-face meetings and conferences. But, isn't that one of our main regional-science research questions: Is distance dead? If so, there will be less reason for regional scientists because the "world is flat," though I suspect we will survive to tell the tale.

The other opportunity from Covid-19 is that it presents a chance to assess the spatial dimensions of how the pandemic unfolded and how the world can be put back together in a more sustainable just manner. Regional scientists are the scholars who are best fit to answer these questions. The effects of this pandemic hit regions differently and it also had different effects across regions based on the institutional quality that affect the ability of governments to manage the pandemic and the economic aftermath. Because these factors are spatial, regional scientists understand the data, the empirical and theoretical models, and the institutional frameworks. This is an opportunity to raise the visibility of regional science on a worldwide basis to other scholars and policymakers. While Covid-19 has created great suffering and inconvenience, we need to take advantage of this opportunity for high-profile research and policy interest to advance our field.

Mark Partridge

*President Regional Science Association International & The Ohio State University*



## RSAI CONFERENCE

*On 20 March 2020, prof. Partridge sent around the following announcement regarding the RSAI World Conference which was to be held in Marrakech in June, which so many of us were looking forward to attending. We reproduce the most important parts of that message here.*

Dear RSAI Members and World Congress Participants,

It is with great regret that I have to announce that the June 2020 World Congress in Marrakech is postponed and will not be held this June. While European countries have suffered the recent brunt of the virus, until late last week, the situation in Morocco was quite good in terms of Covid 19 with zero cases, but that has greatly changed. Last weekend, the local organizers asked to cancel the Congress given the rapidly deteriorating conditions on the ground and RSAI Council agreed.

We had expected a fantastic program for the Congress in an excellent location. Our local organizers and RSAI Executive Director had done incredible work and it is a disappointment. We are considering multiple future options, including again holding the World Congress in Morocco in May 2021. Of course, at this stage, we have to let the dust settle to see what plans we can feasibly make for next year. When appropriate, we will have further announcements. I appreciate all of your support for the Congress and Regional Science and take care of yourselves and family.

Mark Partridge

*President of RSAI*

## MEET THE FELLOWS: ISABELLE THOMAS

**M**APS AND ATLASES always fascinated me as a child, even if I would have loved (and still do!) to be an English/Dutch schoolteacher! I chose geography instead of philology because I perceived very early that geography was a science at the crossroad of many other disciplines, not too specialized but challenging enough and dealing with societal and environmental issues ... and foreign languages could also be useful! I now think that I took the right decision!

From the very beginning of my research career, I was oriented to quantitative analyses and modelling by my promoter/supervisor Hubert Beguin. He almost forced me to do a PhD and decided for me that it would deal with optimal locations, using operational research models and applying them to real-world situations (in my case post-offices). This was quite novel at that time.

After a fruitful Post-doc period, there was unfortunately no academic positions available that were compatible with my family constraints so I left the university for a quite unusual and challenging position: scientific collaborator at the Gendarmerie Headquarters (Brussels). We were a team of two geographers hired as civilians to work in a military environment, two women in a work environment where officers were still men only: an adventure! Our mission: to provide support with geostatistical tools, maps and models. I was in charge of road accidents, my colleague of criminality. Where do accidents occur? Why there? What is the best location of police patrols? What is the optimal



## CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

In all probability, Covid-19 (or simply corona) will still be around in November, when the next issue of this newsletter comes out, and both the pandemic and the structural changes it might set in motion will feed our research for years to come, it seems. If you already have plans or early results from such research, you are warmly invited to contribute a short or longer piece to the next newsletter.

- Size: 400-600 words works best, longer is possible
- Formatting: none, but images/graphs are appreciated
- Deadline: 15 October
- Submit to Martijn Smit, [m.j.smit@uu.nl](mailto:m.j.smit@uu.nl)



partitioning for police districts? This was a period where I learned how to use geospatial techniques or models, and present their results in layman's terms, showing the usefulness of geography in operational decision making. I think most academics would gain from working for a while out of the academic world: such an experience helps enormously in teaching or in writing multidisciplinary research projects.

After this unconventional experience, I came back to university with a FNRS permanent research position at the Department of Geography in Louvain-la-Neuve (Be) where I mainly conducted research in economic and transport geography, and additionally taught several courses such as statistical cartography, transport or economic geography and gave tutorials on thesis preparation. I also wrote a second doctoral dissertation on the sensitivity of location-allocation models to transportation issues. I later moved to the Center of Operations Research and Econometrics (CORE), an internationally well-known scientific research centre, where I was the only geographer among mainly economists, operational researchers and engineers.

Now more than ever I feel rich and stronger for those multidisciplinary research experiences. I've particularly appreciated to work at the border of my discipline. I've engaged with very nice and openminded researchers with whom I have exchanged ideas and published. Not only geographers of other universities/countries, but also economists, physicists, engineers, epidemiologists and medical doctors. Constructing a scientific project or publishing together is for sure not an easy task: we think differently, we've other priorities, we refer to other models/theories, and even write our scientific papers differently. But what satisfaction when we succeed in respecting each other, taking advantage of our complementarities, constructing new ideas and realizing in fact that we deal with the same questions but with different words, tools or theories.

Quantitative geography has a great future especially in regional sciences. Geography has always dealt with locations, large data sets or nested scales and has accumulated knowledge, even if geographers are often shy in putting this forward. Geography is hence now more than ever ready to deal with topics such as complexities or "big data". Small or big, new data types appear every day: sensors become censors in the new smart environments. Geographers know better than any other researcher that spatial data are special... Big data do not change fundamentally the problems; there is no need to reinvent the wheel: aggregation biases, close things are more related than distant things, statistical biases, etc. It seems that nowadays I too frequently read papers that simply let the data speak by themselves, without any caution. I hope to have time in the coming years to further work on these topics, to fight with geographical tools against data bulimia and theory anorexia, to help machine learning researchers in further

constructing meaningful models that do not reinvent geography but push forward their results into further models and theories.

I'm so happy and proud as a geographer to be awarded the RSAI Fellowship. I never aimed for it, but it happened in 2019 (*pictured on the left, with prof. Partridge*). I'm simply enjoying the moment!



*Isabelle Thomas  
Research Director at the National Fund for Scientific Research (FRS-FNRS)  
Extraordinary Professor, Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve  
(Belgium)*

## CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN REGIONAL SCIENCE: HANNOVER

**O**UR WORLD IS facing radical and very rapid changes. Economic globalization and global environmental change, including climate change, are affecting our planet in entirely new ways. These changes are leading to transformations of the economy and people's livelihoods – globally, regionally and locally. More than ever before, the world is interconnected, and changes in one world region thus have serious and often immediate repercussions for others. The Department of Economic Geography at Leibniz University Hanover (LUH) is concerned with how regional economic systems and people act and react to these rapid changes. This motivates our research as well as our teaching in Hanover.

The economic geography group with its three professors forms the largest group within the Institute of Economic and Cultural Geography at Leibniz University Hanover (LUH) and plays a significant role in regional studies within the German-speaking academic world. The group includes about 20 researchers and technical staff including postdocs and doctoral students, as well as roughly 15 student assistants supporting the group.

The group's three professors work on a diverse range of topics relating to the above-mentioned thematic context, emphasizing theoretical relevance, methodological advances and policy relevance. Rolf Sternberg is focusing his research on the spatial implications of entrepreneurship, innovation and digitalization. He has also led the German team of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM), the largest global research consortium to compare entrepreneurial activities across countries, since its inception in 1999. Ingo Liefner has a profound interest in knowledge flows and knowledge dynamics, sustainability innovation, and innovations in developing countries. His research often involves studies in China and other Asian countries. Kerstin Nolte is interested in rural transformation – triggered by global environmental change and economic globalization – and the resulting livelihood strategies. She has extensively researched large-scale land acquisitions with a regional focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. The economic geography group fosters the exchange of ideas through a number of regular events such as a biweekly research brown bag, a more formal research colloquium and informal junior scholar discussion rounds. These events also promote scholarly exchange with the cultural geography group within the institute as well as with researchers from outside the institute.





#### HISTORY

Hanover is a city with roughly 500,000 inhabitants. It is the capital of the Federal State of Lower Saxony, located in the northern part of Germany. The LUH is its largest university with about 30,000 students and 3,100 researchers. Despite the university's previous status as a technical university up until 1978, the university is now also known for its strong social sciences.

Economic geography in Hanover was established as early as 1921. It has continuously stimulated the direction of research and education in German economic geography since the late 1970s. The economic geography group in Hanover has consistently emphasized the trinity of theory, empirical analysis and policy relevance as three interconnected aspects of economic geography. Following this concept, economic geography is understood to aim at understanding spatial economic systems with their structural, interactive and process characteristics. This concept provides our starting point to address the research needs and topics that require our attention today.

Economic geography in Hanover emphasizes students' employability, research abilities and career prospects at all levels of education. As of today, close to 1,000 students have entered the labor market equipped with a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or a diploma in economic geography from Hanover, and nine current full professors in economic geography working at research universities worldwide received a significant part of their education in Hanover.

#### RESEARCH PRIORITIES

To provide but a few examples, researchers at our institute focus on research topics including:

Global environmental changes and sustainable development

- How do households and firms react to structural and environmental changes in a globalized economy?
- How can new technology contribute to a more sustainable economic development?

Entrepreneurship and start-ups

- What drives business formation and how does it affect the regional economy?
- How does the regional and institutional context influence start-ups?

Knowledge and innovation

- Which regional characteristics influence the formation of new knowledge?
- How do radically new technologies change the established landscape of industry leadership?
- How are ideas transferred between and within globalized firms?

Mobility and digitalization

- How does digitalization impact regional disparities?
- How do new mobility concepts change spatial economic patterns? How can they contribute to a more sustainable mobility?

Regional foci of our research are on all those places in the world that exemplify different approaches towards dealing with the global changes outlined above and that shape the ways in which economies and people affect our world. Current research projects include empirical research in and intensive academic exchange with Germany, North America, China, India, South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

#### TEACHING PRIORITIES

The concept of economic geography in Hanover motivates and influences the master's program, which delivers courses in theory, methods and policy, besides stressing the need for acquiring international expertise and competence while developing individual abilities and profiles. In contrast to many other

master's programs in this field, the Hannover program teaches quantitative methods on an advanced level and encourages students to explore big data. The master's program in economic geography has a capacity of 25 students, and on average recruits half of its graduate students from internal undergraduate programs and the other half from other universities.

The institute's research priorities leave a strong mark on teaching, for example by including students in research projects from early on through introducing current research findings in undergraduate and postgraduate courses, as well as regularly hiring student assistants to support ongoing projects, which provides early contact to research. Therefore, many of our master students also decide to pursue a doctoral degree.

Besides excellence in education and research, we believe in and promote internationalization. We have ERASMUS exchange cooperation with about 20 European universities and encourage students during their master's degree to spend a semester abroad, either at a university or for an extended internship, within or outside Europe.

Moreover, the economic geography group hosts a biannual International Seminar in Economic Geography (ISEG) twice a year. This week-long seminar invites non-German scholars from fields related to economic geography to teach and interact with students and staff of the department. The list of guests includes scholars such as Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (1998), Maryann Feldman (2006), Ron Boschma (2011), Roberta Capello (2012), David Rigby (2016) and Elisa Giuliani (2019).

*Rolf Sternberg  
Kerstin Nolte  
Ingo Liefner*



*Student participants of one of the ISEG seminars.*



*Students at an ISEG seminar, with Rolf Sternberg (standing) and Attila Varga from Pécs (sitting, back).*



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## ERSA SUMMER SCHOOL 2019 (KATOWICE)

The idea behind the ERSA Summer School – international summer schools for PhD candidates and junior researchers – has remained unchanged for many years: the school brings together budding and seasoned researchers. The 32nd ERSA summer school, which was held on 16–22 June 2019, crowned almost two-year of preparations by the ERSA Polish Section and the University of Economics of Katowice.



*Prof. Torre at the ERSA summer school.*

The seven days of the school were extremely intense – they featured 8 lectures delivered by the mentors, recognized scientists, and 24 presentations given by the junior researchers. Each presentation was followed by a heated discussion and constructive criticism about the theoretical and methodological aspects of the research works as well as the interpretation of the research findings. Questions, suggestions and the exchange of views often took more time than the presentations themselves, which proves the value of this kind of discussion. Unsurprisingly, a lot of issues were raised by the presentations of the experienced academics, among whom there were Ron Boschma of Utrecht University, Andrea Caragliu of the Polytechnic University of Milan, Leila Kebir of the University of Lausanne, Chiara del Bo of the University of Milan, Eveline van Leeuwen of Wageningen University, Stefan Rehak of the University of Economics in Bratislava, and Mariusz Sokołowicz of the University of Lodz. Their lectures covered the following research areas:

- regional smart specializations in the context of the related / unrelated variety concept,
- relationships between urban and extra-urban areas in the EU, proximity and territory as indicators of company productivity,
- generic and specific resources and their role in urban and regional development,
- the role of universities in urban and regional development,
- historical heritage and its role in the development of cities,
- urban economics and research methods in urban economics,
- smart cities and smart cities policies.

Also, the participants took part in a study visit to the Guido coal mine, which provided an opportunity to look at various models used across the world to revitalize post-industrial objects and the role of preserved objects in cities and regions. The event brought together representatives of 32 research and academic centers from Europe and Asia, just three from Poland, thus gathering an extraordinary multicultural group. The junior researchers, who came to Katowice from 15 countries, developed an instant rapport based on the research interests they share. In the evaluation reports of the event, the participants appreciated the school, stressing that it is an excellent way to learn and gain experience in the international setting. They also expressed their wish for the school to become a regular entry in the Katowice-based university's calendar of scientific events.

*Artur Ochojski*

*(Parts of the text have been published in UE Forum, iss. 2019, the magazine of the University of Economics in Katowice)*



*Participants at the ERSA summer school (top) and prof. Van Leeuwen in action (bottom).*



## NARSC 2019 (PITTSBURGH)

THE NORTH AMERICAN Regional Science Council met for the 66th annual conference last fall in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the historic Omni William Penn Hotel. Over 400 conference participants had the opportunity to watch the annual cleaning of the hotel's famous Maria Theresa Chandeliers, a ritual that kicks off the holiday season, all the while meeting with co-authors and discussing conference sessions in the lobby of the hotel.

### THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

In his presidential address, Stephan Goetz discussed the importance of network analysis to regional science examining how regional interdependence shapes regional economic growth.

### AWARDS

Daniel McMillen received the 2019 Walter Isard Award for distinguished scholarly achievement for his continued work advancing regional science by highlighting the importance of spatial heterogeneity and pioneering non-parametric econometric methods. The 2019 William Alonso Prize for innovative work in regional science was awarded to Alan Murray and Richard Church. Elizabeth Mack was awarded the 2019 Geoffrey Hewings Award for distinguished scholarly contributions for her work evaluating the impact of emerging technologies such as broadband and entrepreneurial ecosystems on the development trajectory of regional economies. Dan Rickman received the 2019 David Boyce Award for distinguished service to regional science and Jim LeSage received the 2019 Jean Paelinck Award recognizing the truly outstanding scholarly achievement of a senior and internationally recognized



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regional scientist. Tidiane Ly, GATE Lyone Saint-Etienne, received the NARSC graduate student-authored paper competition award for his paper "Taxes, traffic jam and spillover in the metropolis". Oudom Hean, The Ohio State University, received the NARSC graduate student-led paper competition for his paper, "The impact of metropolitan technology on the non-metropolitan labor market: evidence from US patents". Prottoy A. Akbar, the University of Pittsburgh, won the 19th Annual Benjamin H. Stevens Graduate Fellowship in Regional Science to support his dissertation research entitled, "Public Transit Accessibility and Income Segregation".

For a look at the full conference program, please visit the website at <http://www.narsc.org>. Follow NARSC on twitter, @NARSCRegScience for the latest updates in regional science from NARSC including information on the next conference, the 67th annual conference that will be held in San Diego, California November 11-14, 2020.

*Amanda Weinsstein  
University of Akron*



*credit for all pictures from NARSC: Luis Armando Galvis*

## RETHINKING INPUT-OUTPUT ANALYSIS

JAN OOSTERHAVEN, [RETHINKING INPUT-OUTPUT ANALYSIS. A SPATIAL PERSPECTIVE](#). SPRINGER BRIEFS IN REGIONAL SCIENCE, DECEMBER 2019, ISBN 978-3-030-33446-8

This book primarily aims at upper level Bachelor and Master students, but is also helpful for practitioners in research and consulting firms and agencies. It showcases the social, economic and environmental importance of the relations between industries in the same and in different regions and countries, and learns how to model these relations by means of regional, interregional and international IO models. It shows how to extend the basic IO models with endogenous household expenditures, and teaches how to use the modern IO tables called supply-use tables, which explicitly distinguish the products used and sold, and Social Accounting Matrices that additionally show the spatial and governmental redistribution of value added. Besides the standard demand-driven IO quantity model, this book also lays out the economic assumptions of its supply-driven mirror image, indicates its extremely limited usefulness, and explains that its lesser known, accompanying revenue-pull IO price model is almost as useful as the much better known cost-push IO price model that accompanies the standard IO quantity model.

After the mainly theoretical first chapters, the final chapters critically discuss three well known applications of the IO model, namely (1) economic impact analysis of negative supply shocks caused by, for example, natural and man-made disasters, (2) regional and interregional forward and backward linkage analysis, better known as key sector analysis, and (3) structural decomposition analysis of regional, national and interregional economic growth. In all three cases, the standard IO approach is shown along with its problematic implications, such as producing misleadingly high multipliers in the first case and presenting policy makers with only half of the truth in the other two cases. Of course, the necessary additions to and changes in the standard approach are presented as well.

This book emphasizes the behavioural foundations of the two IO quantity and the two IO price models, and the plausibility of the causal mechanisms implied by the mathematics of the base models. This leads to a far more critical evaluation of the usefulness of IO analysis than found in standard textbooks. This book thus hopefully provides a better understanding of the foundations, the power, and the limitations of input-output analysis.

*Jan Oosterhaven*

## POSITIONS

GSSI in L'Aquila, Italy, announces it has open PhD positions with 7 scholarships in Regional Science and Economic Geography. The official language for all PhD courses is English. The scholarships are awarded for 4 years and their yearly amount is € 16,159.91 gross. All PhD students will have free accommodation at the GSSI facilities and use of the canteen.

The application must be submitted through the online form available at [www.gssi.it/phd/](http://www.gssi.it/phd/) by 11 June 2020, 5 pm (Italian time zone).

For more information, check [the GSSI website](#).



#### THEME: REAL ESTATE

*Before the advent of corona, this newsletter was to have the position of real estate within regional science as a theme: what are themes we currently work on, what are possible avenues for the future, what are our relationships with real estate researchers outside regional science, and, last but not least, what do we teach? The newsletter editors are grateful for the two submissions received, and more contributions are welcome, so that we can continue this topic in the next newsletter. Contributions from Latin America, Asia and Africa are particularly welcome.*

#### REGIONAL SCIENCE AND REAL ESTATE: TWO WORLDS DRIFTING APART?

*Edwin Buitelaar, Professor of Land and Real Estate Development at Utrecht University*

REAL ESTATE IS not an academic discipline in itself, in the sense that it does not have its own body of distinctive theories and methods that ties together its knowledge. It is nevertheless a subject of research and education, in universities, research institutes and business schools. For a proper understanding of real estate, it should be approached from an interdisciplinary perspective, which combines urban economics/regional science, finance, law, urban planning, organisational studies and management. This is because real estate is a multifaceted object or phenomenon. It requires both regional science and finance because real estate offers accommodation to businesses and households on the one hand and offers a return to investors as a financial asset on the other. Urban planning and management are required because we need to understand both the coming about of real estate (i.e. real estate development) and the management of it once it is operational (i.e. property, asset and portfolio management).

An interdisciplinary field needs experts that are willing to stretch beyond their own discipline and engage with others. It is my observation that this attitude is under pressure as a result of disciplinary specialisation. And this is the result of the institutionalised (or self-imposed) pressure to publish (a lot) in A-journals. Books, such as general textbooks, policy reports or other socially relevant outlets are much less credited. Although publishing by journal articles helps to have some form of quality control and some form of performance measurement, it harbours the risk of producing one-trick ponies. The probability of having an article accepted in a highly rated journal increases if one focuses on particular niches rather than covering a subject with more breadth.

A specific form of disciplinary specialisation that I seem to notice in regional science and urban economics, is what I call methodological specialisation. Increasingly, the focus appears to be on methodological innovation and improving statistical identification strategies, rather than on trying to understand the empirical phenomena. Coming up with an instrumental variable (IV), however far-fetched they sometimes are, becomes the aim rather than the 'instrument'. This is because the endogeneity police are never far away.

In the case of real estate, there is a specific, additional problem. Real estate markets (commercial real estate rather than housing markets) are inherently 'thin': there are few heterogeneous transactions. This causes problems for the availability and quality of datasets. This, too, does not help the popularity of real estate as a research object within regional science.



The thematic niche tendency and the preoccupation with advanced econometrics implies that regional science research (and education) into real estate is partial and tends to only scratch the surface. Interdisciplinary research and a greater methodological variety are needed to connect the different subthemes within real estate and to gain a better insight in the underlying mechanisms that determine what we see at the surface.

#### REGIONAL SCIENCE 20+

*Arno J. van der Vlist, Department of Economic Geography at the University of Groningen*

ONE OF MY colleagues asked me the other day about the future of Regional Science. This signaled two things. First, I sensed a kind of urgency as if Regional Science had no longer anything to offer. Second, this revealed that my colleague must be considerable younger than I am. I recall similar discussions in the 1990s being a grad student in my 20s. Admittedly, the issue did not cross my mind thereafter until my colleague's question only recently.



A simple search in EBSCO/ECONLIT gives a long list of papers in all kind of Journals on the future of regional science. So the future of Regional Science: is it pointy or pointless? Recent years have seen a further specialization within Regional Science and Urban Economics. The specialization perhaps does not relate to the specific topic but in terms of narrative and approach. It also lead to more and more specialized conferences and workshops each with its own style and preconceptions. At least that is what I sense.

These developments in Regional Science and Urban Economics seems a little orthogonal to what Heckman and Singer (2017) describe as an abductive approach. The authors indicate that, I cite: 'Abduction is the process of generating and revising models, hypotheses, and data analyzed in response to surprising findings.' (p.298). Indeed, in the reflection of different perspectives is the glittering of diamonds.

The current outbreak of Covid-19 provides a perfect test case, or if you want a quasi-natural experiment, of how combining research approaches brings about new knowledge and understanding. Knowledge and understanding which is urgently needed. Knowledge on the transmission and spatial diffusion, and on societal implications of Covid-19 is almost absent. This includes many aspects typically covered in regional science and urban economics broadly defined. Also 2020+.

#### References

Heckman, J.J. en B. Singer (2017) Abducting Economics. American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings. 107:298-302

## THEME: CORONA RESEARCH

*Of course the RSAI Newsletter cannot ignore the problems but also opportunities the worldwide corona pandemic presents. Three contributions arrived in time to be included here; if you also have something to contribute, please send an email to [m.j.smit@uu.nl](mailto:m.j.smit@uu.nl).*

### COWORKING SPACES AND PANDEMIC COVID-19: WILL PERIPHERAL AREAS MATTER?

*Ilaria Mariotti & Dante Di Matteo, Politecnico di Milano*

THE PANDEMIC CAUSED by the massive spread of the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 in 2019-2020 has rapidly altered the habits and lifestyle of every citizen worldwide and will have effects in the medium-long run. The need to feed the 'social distancing' in order to minimise the chances of transmission of the virus has unavoidably brought to light also the need for a reschedule of working methods. Most of the service workers had to move from traditional work in the office (second place) to work at home (first place) through smart or remote working. Besides, while many services (i.e. as financial and basic public services), may be successfully provided without the need of a physical interaction, other types of services need face-to-face contacts: it is the case of the creative and innovative class of workers, to which most the co-workers (CW) of the co-working spaces (CS) belong. The co-working space is defined "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989), where free-lance, autonomous workers, innovative start-up and firms can interact and develop a "community". The proximity measures a la Boschma (2005) – geographical, social, institutional, cognitive, and organizational – represent the spirit of co-working, where interaction and knowledge exchange are pivotal for such working communities (Mariotti, Akhavan, 2020).

The (full or partial) lockdown of activities imposed by a growing number of cities and metropolitan areas represents a possible threat for the creative and innovative class of CW and for the CS itself. The majority of CS worldwide are, indeed, located in metropolitan cities, where there is a concentration of urban amenities (Mariotti et al., 2017).

In Italy, more than the 80% of the 548 CS (at 2018) are located in poles or multi-municipality service centres, 16% is in 'belt' municipalities, while only 3.5% is in intermediate or peripheral areas (SNAI classification of Inner Areas). On the other side, a (sad) analogy concerning the spread of the new coronavirus in Italy shows that the most relevant clusters of the pandemic are recognised in the more innovative, densely populated NUTS-3 provinces of northern Italy (in particular, Milan, Brescia and Bergamo), whose cities and metropolitan areas host the large majority of CS.

Nonetheless, even after the end of the health emergency, many services, like those related to the CS, may not turn back to their initial state (at least in the mid-term), since dramatic exogenous shocks like a global pandemic require a resilience capacity that not every individual or enterprise own. Besides, since most activities run by the CW can be carried out at home via smart working, a contraction of the CS is more than plausible.



Within this context, the COST Action project CA18214 "The geography of new working spaces and the impact on the periphery" (2019-2023) aims at exploring the phenomenon of new working spaces, including co-working, with a specific focus on those located in peripheral areas, which, in the context of the present pandemic, might become more and more attractive for CS and CW for the following main reasons.

<sup>1</sup>First, the potential benefits deriving from a workplace located in a remote area are well known, such as a higher general well-being, lower congestion, less polluted air, lower cost location, exploiting institutional leeway, etc. As Eder and Trippel (2019) have pointed out, peripheral areas host the so-called "slow innovators" that rely less on information and knowledge that is time-sensitive. Their ideas result in incremental and process innovation rather than in radical innovations and they benefit from the social and cultural diversity their small communities offer. Moreover, the positive effects of being in peripheral areas have been depicted by Mariotti and Di Matteo (2020) in their recent work on the effects of CS location on CW revenue growth in Italy. It results that CW working in CS settled in peripheral areas may have higher chances to increase their revenues if compared to individuals working in CS in urban poles

Finally, peripheral destinations in Italy, probably because of their geographical isolation, are those which have suffered less from the spread of the Covid-19, and these places might be the first to remove the 'social distancing' and restart a normal life at the end of the emergency, thus being considered 'safer places'.

From the perspective of local administrators of peripheral municipalities, attracting CS located in urban poles that have been greatly affected by the Covid-19 might be a good strategy, maybe offering them incentives and/or tax benefits to relocate to their municipality. This suggestion may also be of great importance both for CS managers and CW in order to reschedule the resumption of their activities. If we consider that being in such places may be profitable both for the hosting destinations and for the individuals, relocation hypotheses of CS and CW from the urban poles to remote areas should not be underestimated.

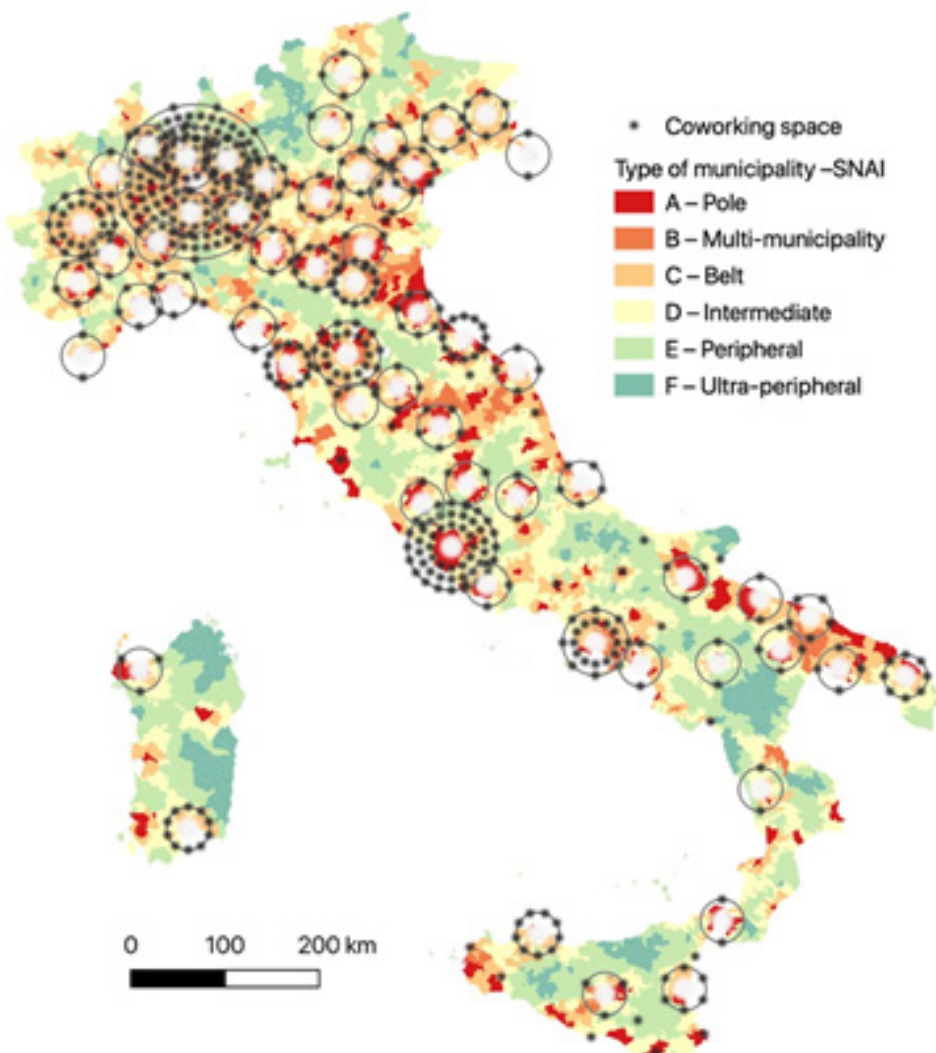
Nevertheless, the scenario we depict presents some criticalities and uncertainties. First, creative innovative, and skilled workers are more willing to live in metropolitan areas (Florida, 2002). If, from one side, the locus amoenus patterns of remote areas improve the quality of life, the lack of infrastructures (i.e. broadband, low transport accessibility) can inhibit every type of work. Besides, if the policy makers promote the location of CS in peripheral areas by hosting them, for instance, in public libraries or other public premises (Di Marino, Lapintie, 2018), it is necessary to verify: (i) the potential demand of CW and CS managers and their willingness to pay for these services, evaluating also the sustainability of the project in the long run; (ii) the technical feasibility and start-up costs; (iii) the risk to denature the co-working concept, due to the loss of dynamism and involvement in sharing the space in favour of a more static and utilitarian use of it. This scenario, beyond the complexity of the time being, is characterised by the uncertainty of the operation's time lane and, therefore, by the impossibility to estimate the investment payback time.

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<sup>1</sup> The CA18214 project involves 28 countries, and aims to: (i) identify new working spaces' typologies, reveal their spatial distribution, and explain their location patterns; (ii) measure and evaluate the (direct and indirect) effects of these new working spaces; (iii) collect, discuss and develop guidelines for tailored policy and planning measures. The authors are members of the project. See <https://www.cost.eu/cost-action/the-geography-of-new-working-spaces-and-the-impact-on-the-periphery/>.





*Figure 1: The location of coworking spaces in Italy*

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## COVID-19 OUTBREAK AND THE OLDER ADULTS IN ITALY: TWO FACES OF THE SOCIALITY

*Mina Akhavan, Ilaria Mariotti, & Federica Rossi, DASTU-Politecnico di Milano*

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC has mostly affected older adults (over 65). Yet, why has Italy suffered more confirmed coronavirus deaths than Germany and the Nordic countries? In a recent publication, Bayer and Kuhn (2020) argue that within this outbreak, patterns of social interaction play a key role in determining fatality rates. In Italy, there are relatively higher intergenerational interactions, which partly explain the data gap with other European countries. This trend is also proved by data on the share of adults, aged 30-49, who co-habit with a parent. That in Italy is above 20%, while in others (i.e. France, Switzerland and the Netherlands) it is relatively lower (less than 5%). In 2019, the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT) estimated an approximate number of 6,810 young adults aged 18-34, single and unmarried, who live with at least one parent. In addition, grandparents represent a precious resource for families, especially with two full-time working parents, in managing their school-age children.

An interesting analysis on the older adults' level of 'sociality' in Italy is provided by the survey 'Aspects of Daily Life- Multi-Purpose Survey' on families, conducted by ISTAT since 1993. From the total number of the respondents in 2017, 5,867 (12%) are older adults aged between 65 and 75 and 5,952 (12.2%) are in the age group 65-74. A first point of reflection comes from the question: How often do you meet friends in your spare time? 52.3% replied "at least once a week", while 14% said every day. The most popular places where to meet are: cinemas (15.3%), museums (17.6%), archaeological sites and monuments (14.3%). The seniors' habits also concern their attendance at churches or other places of worship (39% go at least once a week). About 19.4% declared they went out for dinner/lunch at least once a month, while the participation in association activities or voluntary groups is lower (about 7%).

What has been described so far concerns national average values but it is interesting to deepen the study of the older adults' level of "sociality" with a focus on an urban context, specifically the case of Milan. The analysis refers to the MOBILAGE project<sup>2</sup>, which aims to explore the mobility behaviours of older adults in three peripheral Milanese neighbourhoods (Gallaratese, Niguarda-Cà-Granda and Gratosoglio) in 2018-19, showing a concentration of older adults higher than the city's average, and exploiting different levels of accessibility to Local Public Transport (TPL) and other services. A representative sample of 246 seniors, selected on the basis of gender and age groups (65-69 years, 70-74 and 75+), participated in the interviews, which have been carried out indoors (clubs for seniors, commercial centres, sports centres, etc.) and outdoors (parks, TPL stops, etc.). In fact, the survey was addressed to "active" seniors, i.e. those who, alone or accompanied by others, can go outside, even with the help of mobility aids such as wheelchairs or walking sticks. An interesting question is: how often do you interact with your friends, your family or the people who live in your neighbourhood? Figure 1 shows that 72% replied once or several times a day.

<sup>2</sup> The project 'MOBILAGE: Mobility and Ageing: Daily Life and Welfare Supportive Networks at the Neighbourhood Level' is financed by Fondazione Cariplo (grant n.2017-0942, [www.mobilage.unina.it](http://www.mobilage.unina.it)). Three universities are involved: DASTU-Politecnico di Milano (Leader), University of Groningen (NL) and the University of Naples Federico II (IT).

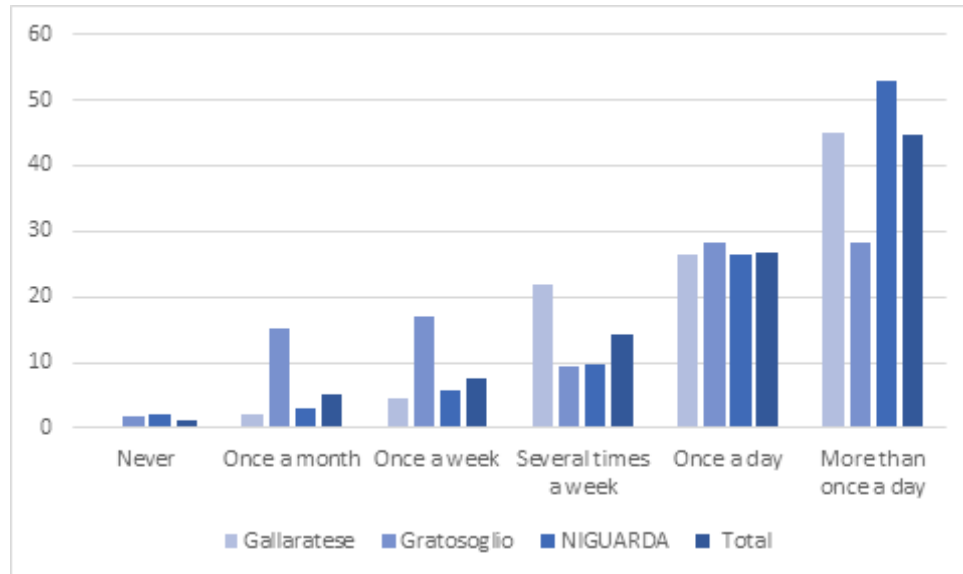




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*Figure 1: How often do you interact with your friends, family or people living in your neighbourhood? (% own elaboration)*

The intense interpersonal relationships of the elderly in Italy has been confirmed by Mossong et al. (2008) who highlight how Germans record the lowest number of daily contacts (average value: 7.95), while Italians represent the largest (average value: 19.77).

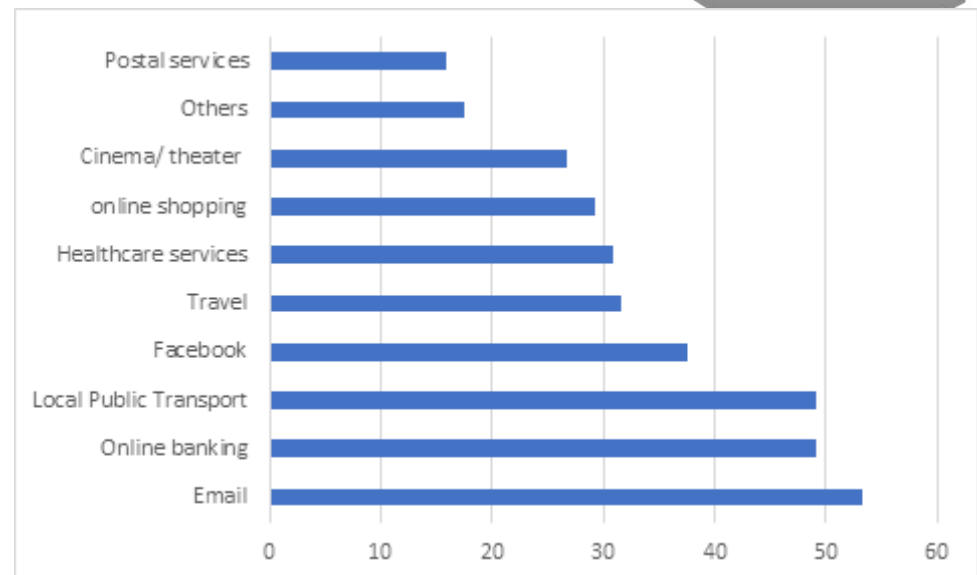
The question regarding ‘meeting place’ underlines the key role of the “home”, followed by community spaces (associations, library, clubs, etc.), open public spaces, bars and online interactions. Moreover, the project highlighted the importance of accessible –by foot or by LPT– services within the neighbourhood (e.g. supermarkets, drugstores, etc.), investigating what is known as “aging in place” – that is the ability to live in their home and neighbourhood safely and independently (Mestheneos, 2011). On the other hand, the so-called “place in ageing” concerns “the identification and understanding of the environment’s role in aging” (Gardner, 2011). The results of the survey show that the majority (88%) of the elderly would like to keep on living in their neighbourhoods (ageing in place), and a high number of respondents (74%) is happy with the overall offered services in the neighbourhood (place in ageing).

In the current lockdown situation and in the following phases 2 and 3 of the pandemic, older adults have been forced to change their way of living, and will have to further adapt their habits, reducing physical interactions. Thus, the active lifestyle promoted by the literature is no longer practicable (Baništer and Bowling, 2014). An interesting example of how the neighbourhoods for elders might look like comes from the Dutch “Integrated Service Area (ISA)” policy, where community support services are located within 400 meters (Jansen et al., 2018). If the home becomes the centre of the elderly person’s lives during the pandemic, useful support can certainly come from home automation and the use of internet, that will allow them to be as independent as possible, keep relations – despite the physical distance – and buy goods and services online.

But, do Milanese older adults use internet? The survey shows that 59% (144 people) use a smartphone and, among them, 87% (105 people) use internet by phone. Moreover, 45% of respondents (114 people) use internet for: e-mail exchanges, collecting information on LPT, consulting Facebook, accessing health and travel services, booking tickets, home banking, and postal services (Figure 2). In addition, 15% uses e-commerce services.

The national context is rather different: 75% have never used the internet, while among those using internet, 55% use it daily and 32.3% few times a week. Finally, 67.6% of the users have never ordered and bought online. Therefore, although elderly living in Milan seem to be “smarter”, it cannot be denied that

the target of the MOBILAGE project were the active elderly.



*Figure 2: Online activities (%)*

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## COLOPHON

The newsletter of the Regional Science Association International (RSAI) appears two times a year and contains information about upcoming conferences and meetings, recent events and publications, and short contributions on current themes. Contributions are most welcome, and can be submitted directly to Martijn Smit (m.j.smit@uu.nl) and/or Graham Clarke (g.p.clarke@leeds.ac.uk). Deadline for the next issue is 15 October; earlier contact is much appreciated.

