

Open Special Session Proposal
for
RSA Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Conference 2019

Session Title: **Territory, Politics, Governance in the Western Balkans Region**

Session organiser(s): **The Western Balkans Network on Territorial Governance (TG-WeB)**

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The Western Balkans Region is emerging as a macro-region in the European context, from both geographical-historical and political perspectives. The region is rich in local and regional diversity and features complex socio-economic and environmental interactions that have led to internal conflicts and an external perception of being 'intriguing and provocative'. The region's multifaceted relations mirror on the territory and on the way the territory is being used. The Western Balkans' territory, a common resource to the people living there, is important to the future of Europe in relation to numerous aspects: climate change, pollution mitigation, geopolitics, energy networks, migration and stability, rule of law, and economic development.

Despite differences and diversities, Western Balkans countries share their aspiration for European Union (EU) integration. Recently the EU has reconfirmed its intentions on the matter in a document titled "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans" (hereinafter referred to as *enlargement perspective*). The *enlargement perspective* considers the membership of the Western Balkans as a *geostrategic investment* for what it defines as an "own political, security, and economic interest" for a "stable, strong and united Europe based on common values", and puts *rule of law, addressing of structural weaknesses related to a functioning economy, and resolution of bilateral disputes* squarely into focus.

The *enlargement perspective* does not explicitly address issues of territorial governance, development and politics. TG-WeB considers the territory-related issues as fundamental to the sustainable development of the region (on a country level and as a macro-region), and considers territory as key for the translation of EU policies into Western Balkans practice. The region experiences several territorial issues, such as unbalanced regional development and disparities, overexploitation and unethical use of territorial resources, monocentric territorial structures, tendency of [re]centralisation of government, conflicting sectorial orientation of policies instead of harmonised horizontal coordination, inadequate spatial planning, weak rule of law and persistent corruption, etc. A better insight into the nature of these issues is significant in view of Western Balkans' eventual path to the EU. They constitute underlying structural matters that affect the successful implementation of the objectives of the credible *enlargement perspective*.

The aim of this special session is to generate knowledge on territorial development, governance and politics in the Western Balkans, and facilitate exchange among EU and Western Balkans researchers, in order to contribute to filling the gap of Western Balkans

place-based evidence and perspectives in relation to a combined 'EU – Western Balkans' territorial development. Aligning EU and Western Balkans perspectives is a necessary step towards the mutual preparation of both parties for the much-expected integration. From a theoretical perspective, the contributions and debates during this special session intend to provide input to a comprehensive territorial, multi-level, and polycentric governance discourse, by bringing in perspectives from a macro-region that is insufficiently studied with regards to its territorial politics and governance. On a policy-making level, the contributions of the participating scholars and professionals should feed recommendations, or draw attention to how the Western Balkans' integration path could be tailored, taking into account the Western Balkans territorial and socio-economic diversities.

For this interdisciplinary special session, we invite researchers to submit contributions under the following potential topics/themes of interest:

Western Balkans' geopolitical perspective

- Evolving [geo]politics of the territory in the Western Balkans;
- The effects of international actors, policies, programs and initiatives on territorial development, policies, strategies and governance in Western Balkans;
- Western Balkans' territorial visions in the framework of Europe 2050: the future and challenges of territorial, social, ecological, economic and infrastructural connectivity of and continuities between the Western Balkans region and the EU.

EU and Western Balkans

- The links with and effects from territorial cooperation at regional, interregional and intra-regional level in the Western Balkans; the role of territorial actors in cross-border regions and programs; the preparation of and related challenges for Western Balkans governments to endorse the regional development and cohesion policy, in their way of preparing for integration;
- Western Balkans territorial development in the view of European macro-regions;
- Innovative territorial/spatial planning and development mechanisms and approaches in the view of economic, societal and institutional Europeanization of the Western Balkans.

Territorial Governance challenges in the Western Balkans region

- The way territorial identities, diversities and resistance are shaping governance and territorial politics in the Western Balkans;
- Governance innovation in Western Balkans: Integrated approaches to sustainable territorial development and the related governance shifts in Western Balkans; from multilevel governance to territorial polycentric governance, prospects for regional governance;
- Territorial governance within sectors – integrated approaches, horizontal and vertical cooperation, and the challenge of scale, as lessons to territorial planning and development;
- Western Balkans territorial rescaling in the discourse of territory as a social construct versus territory as a deterministic concept and construction; links between territorial rescaling and public and private/community institutions and modes governance;
- Metropolitan areas and city regions, spatial agglomerations, inner peripheries and lagging regions in the Western Balkans: the urban-rural conflict, integrated

- approaches for planning and programming, rescaling, territorial polycentrism and other challenges/opportunities to/for sustainable territorial development;
- The effect of illegal and informal land uses on territorial [environmental] planning, development, and governance approaches in the Western Balkans.

Submission instructions and publication of papers

Please submit your abstract when registering for the conference on the RSA Members' Lounge, choosing "Territory, Politics, Governance in the Western Balkans Region" as Gateway.

Abstracts should be no more than 250 words and include also the following information: title of contribution; author name/s and affiliation, and up to 4 keywords.

Contributors will be selected based on the quality of their submitted abstracts, originality, interest and alignment to the scope and objectives of the theme. Our final aim is to bring together researchers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, who share common ground through their interest in territorial governance, development and politics studies, and are actively involved in current debates, critics and development of models in/for the region.

Note on the publication

As a network, we will consider submitting selected papers for a special issue of the RSA journal *'Territory, Politics, Governance'* (Print ISSN: 2162-2671, Online ISSN: 2162-268X), upon the respective RSA requirements and instructions.