

RSA Winter Conference Session Proposal

Session Title:

Understanding the Configurations of Place-Based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: New Conceptual and Methodological Approaches

Session Organisers:

Fumi Kitagawa, Ben Spigel, University of Edinburgh
Dan Prokop, Cardiff University
Cristian Gherhes, University of Sheffield

The idea of the proposed session originates from a group of academics and practitioners participating in the ESRC project *Entrepreneurial and Innovation Ecosystems in the UK and Japan – Place-based scenarios and options*. The following individuals are particularly acknowledged for the ideas for the proposed session: Colin Mason and Michaela Hruskova (University of Glasgow); Hiro Izushi (Aston University); Tim Vorley (University of Sheffield) and Andrew Stevens (Japan Local Government Centre, London).

The session is open and we seek for wider contributions.

Open/Closed Session:

Open session

Description:

Entrepreneurial ecosystems have emerged as one of the most popular new economic development policies in the last decade, and has become a major focus for entrepreneurship research. However, neither research nor policy has given sufficient recognition to 'place'. In view of geographical differences in the strength of entrepreneurial ecosystems, "one-size fits all" and "top-down" approaches to the ecosystem model are inappropriate and ineffective and risks widening existing disparities across regions and localities.

A more granulated understanding of the heterogeneous nature of places, ecosystems and the complex interactions between actors and their networks across a wide range of contexts is required. In the light of this, the proposed session seeks to better understand the challenges of researching diverse and dynamic *configurations of 'place-based' entrepreneurial ecosystems* and the different roles played by the variety of actors involved. We aim to understand institutional factors behind heterogeneous 'place-based' ecosystems both in terms of conceptual frameworks and research methodologies, which enhance cross-ecosystem learning processes.

Papers from a wide range of geographical contexts are welcome. We welcome conceptual frameworks and topics that encompass diversity, aide comparative studies, and innovative methodological strategies.

Please see below for examples of topics.

Understanding the Configurations of Place-Based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: New Conceptual and Methodological Approaches

As suggested topics, we highlight some of the key institutional factors that condition the configurations of the entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The scale of ecosystems – Entrepreneurial ecosystems have so far emerged at different scales (e.g. region, city-region, city). As such a relevant and timely question is to what extent does the scale of an ecosystem matter and how different actors and factors from different scales coalesce to support the development of an ecosystem. There is a need to investigate whether there is an ‘appropriate’ scale at which the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems can be facilitated or whether this varies with context. Is the concept of nested ecosystems (e.g. neighbourhood, city/region, national) meaningful and, if so, what types of interactions occur between these different scales? To what extent does the scale of an ecosystem matter and how different actors and factors from different scales interact?

Ecosystems and subsystems - Various actors in the ecosystem exist within the complex dynamics of subsystems and it is important to note the spatiality of their networks and subnetworks and their roles played at particular development stages. Can a place have two or more coexisting entrepreneurial ecosystems? (e.g. serving the needs of different types of sectors/firms/actors). How connected are the subsystems/subnetworks to form the full entrepreneurial ecosystem? To what extent do we capture a full entrepreneurial ecosystem?

Multi-level governance and policy interactions – Local innovation and start-up programmes and policies interact between different government levels (e.g. national, regional, city-region, municipalities) and there is a dearth of evidence regarding whether national institutions have responded to specific needs of the place in order to complement local/regional government initiatives. What is the role and scope of intervention of different levels of governance in supporting the development of an ecosystem? Furthermore, little is known about the relationship between entrepreneurship *and* innovation, and the complex dynamics of these policies at different levels. In what ways can cross-ecosystem policy learning be enhanced across different geographical contexts?

Diversity of entrepreneurs - Both policy and research on entrepreneurial ecosystems has been largely focused on digital startups and scale-ups. This reflects both the interest of the major practitioners who helped establish its popularity as well as a broader bias in the research literature towards high-tech and high growth firms. However, this focus excludes a large number of potential entrepreneurs who are not in technology sectors. How do we capture a wider range of entrepreneurs and relevant actors in the ecosystem, including those who may not be very visible in the current policy and research landscape?

Diverse geographical contexts - The focus of entrepreneurial ecosystems research and debate is focused on large cities and successful regions. Post-industrial and peripheral towns, cities and regions have been largely ignored. What about peripheral regions without cities (predominantly rural with some towns)? To what extent is our understanding/models of the entrepreneurial ecosystem based on cities applicable in the context of peripheral regions without cities? (which theoretical elements are important?) What is the role of the institutional factors in explaining differences in the configuration and evolution of the entrepreneurial ecosystems across towns, cities, regions of one or more countries?