



**Report on the Fourth Workshop of the RSA Research Network on Regional Economic and Policy History**  
**“An historical account of regional resilience”**  
**Fryske Akademy/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Leeuwarden (the Netherlands)**  
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**Authors:**



Dr Marijn Molema is a Researcher at the Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Netherlands. He specialises in 20th century History of Regional Economic Policies and is the key contact for the RSA ReHi-network. [m.molema@fryske-akademy.nl](mailto:m.molema@fryske-akademy.nl)



Dr. Martin Åberg is professor of history at Karlstad University, Sweden, and affiliated to the Centre for Regional Studies. Research interests include political mobilization and organization at local and regional level. [martin.aberg@kau.se](mailto:martin.aberg@kau.se)



Dr Arno van der Zwet is a lecturer at the University of the West of Scotland. His research interests are territorial development, territorial politics and European urban policy. [arno.van-der-zwet@uws.ac.uk](mailto:arno.van-der-zwet@uws.ac.uk)



Ronald Plantinga MA is PhD Student at Fryske Akademy/University of Groningen. His thesis is about knowledge driven innovation in the Dutch-Frisian dairy cluster, 1950-2010. [rplantinga@fryske-akademy.nl](mailto:rplantinga@fryske-akademy.nl)

Within both History and Regional Studies, the development of regions and the role of government policies therein are studied. However, here is still a gap to be bridged: both have their own academic infrastructures that can be a barrier to interdisciplinary exchange. Luckily, in the last twenty years a toolbox of a myriad of concepts has emerged that potentially assists the cooperation between the two domains of the sciences. One of



these concepts is resilience which according to Martin and Sunley (2015) can be defined as 'the capacity of a regional or local economy to withstand or recover from market, competitive and environmental shocks to its developmental growth path, if necessary by undergoing adaptive changes to its economic structures and its social and institutional arrangements'. This notion, together with its accompanying concepts like (slow burn) shocks, related and unrelated variety, adaptation and adaptability, has the potency to favour a common language between historians and representatives of regional studies. This is the reason why the 4<sup>th</sup> workshop of the RSA Research Network on Regional Economic and Policy History (ReHi) provided 'an historical account of regional resilience. The overall goal of this network, founded in 2017, is to explore interdisciplinary cross-overs between Regional Studies and History in terms of concepts and research approaches.

A group of historians, geographers, political scientists and an industrial economist gathered from 14 till 16 January 2018 at the Fryske Akademy in Leeuwarden, a research institute of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. Since Leeuwarden is the European Capital of Culture in 2018, the social program of the workshop brought the 15 participants to a former and reconstructed prison, where they were introduced to the cultural program of the year'.

Intellectually, Ron Boschma (Utrecht University) set the tone with his key note lecture in which he provided a Schumpeterian view on resilience. He underscored the necessity of renewing regional economies continuously, by means of adaptation to new variations. Adaption and adaptability depends on historically grown capacities and structures in a region. The double notion of related variety (new combinations between locally related activities) and unrelated variety (new and more radical combinations of existing activities) helps to grasp the process of resilience.

One of the papers took up, implicitly, the theme of related variety focusing on four ocean related clusters in the Norwegian region of Sunnmøre. Driven by strong social capital, in which Christian values and family ties resulted in a shared culture, investments from one cluster (i.e. fishing vessel industry) were redirected to another cluster (i.e. ocean vessels industry) due to the pressure of globalization. In a second paper, culture also



played a key role in the Dutch-Frisian dairy industry. The shock of rising wage levels forced local dairy factories in the 1960 and 1970s to merge into large companies. Compared to private investors, the cooperative movement reacted more adequate to the organizational and technological challenges. From an historical point of view, the authors hypothesized that this difference is connected to a shared, cooperative culture.

A recurrent theme of the discussion were institutional factors. The second key note lecture, given by Otto Raspe from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency embarked on the role of economic policies in (city) regions. An historical inquiry of policies in growth regions showed the drivers of success. In a region such as Eindhoven (the Netherlands) investment in knowledge intensive clusters was the main emphasis of economic development policies, whereas in similar successful regions, like the new town Milton Keynes (UK) policies supported the development of living environment conditions. Employing a comparative research design, Raspe showed that the basis of success is different over time and space.

Papers on the Emilia Romagna region (Italy) endorsed the relevance of policies once more. Strategies for a regional innovation system, designed and implemented in the 1990s, helped several industrial districts in changing its structure. Key were interventions targeted on the long-term improvement of human capital, such as investments in schools and educational methods. Subsequently, Emilia Romagna became an interesting location for lead firms, who changed the industrial structure of the region.

Measuring regional economic resilience was another key theme of the workshop. Taking employment as an indicator of resilience, a paper focused on the long-term development of unemployment numbers at the municipal level in the Low Countries (Belgium and the Netherlands). The study identified correlations between human capital and early industrialization of regions. Interestingly, development paths such as these were also linked to higher unemployment figures in post-industrial times. The latter correlation, though, could not be explained by different levels of human capital - thus underscoring the need for further research. Moving to the southern part of Europe, a paper also analyzed the recessions in Catalonia food exports at the end of the nineteenth



and the beginning of the twentieth century. The paper demonstrated the varied impact of economic shocks on different food products.

Comparative approaches were explored at both a theoretical as well as an empirical level. One comparison focused on the Taiwanese high tech region Hsinchu and the Dutch Eindhoven region. Both regions were affected by historical paths, though in different ways: Taiwanese actors were driven by the necessity of ‘catching up’ – a feeling that let them act early on new challenges, whereas the Eindhoven region acted relatively late (in the 1990s, and after the closing of two main companies). Theoretical contributions came from evolutionary economic geographers working on a project on the resilience of cities in the UK ([www.cityevolutions.org.uk](http://www.cityevolutions.org.uk)). While research is still being undertaken, one of the early lessons is that regional economic history, in a wide sense, would have a lot to contribute in investigating the mechanisms of resilience.

After two days of key note lectures and paper presentations, some general conclusions were drawn by both a historian and a geographer. John Tomaney (UCL) called for a deeper and more common understanding of resilience as a concept. Moreover, a clear definition of institutions is necessary. Both Tomaney and Karel Davids, professor of social-economic history at VU University, stressed the need to be clearer about the unit of analysis: should it be focused on cities, regions, or sectors? What are the differences in terms of resilience? Moreover, Davids pleaded for taking power relationships into account, as well as spatial factors. If adaptation thrives by inter-regional connections, the question arises if all regions have access to new opportunities coming from outside the region. Here the relation between capital and labor, as a classical theme of both the social sciences and the humanities can provide fruitful ground for further interdisciplinary research.

Notwithstanding these unresolved questions and approaches, the workshop inspired to look beyond disciplinary boundaries and learn from each other’s concepts and approaches. Some of the themes will be discussed again in the 5<sup>th</sup> ReHi-workshop on multi-level governance in urban and city regions. This last workshop of the network will take place in Paisley, Scotland in November 2018.



Group photo, from left to right: (back row) Sandrine Labory (University of Ferrara); Johan Tomaney (UCL); Arno van der Zwet (University of the West of Scotland); Robin Philips (International Institute of Social History); Mila Davids (Eindhoven University of Technology); Karel Davids (VU University Amsterdam); Bart Hoogeboom (Fryske Akademy); Mr. Evenhuis; Ronald Plantinga. (front row) Ramon Ramon-Muñoz (University of Barcelona); Ove Bjarnar (Molde University College); Rolv Petter Amdam (BI Norwegian Business School); Dr. Martin Åberg (Karlstad University); Emil Evenhuis (Cambridge University); Marijn Molema (Fryske Akademy).

Overview of presentations in order of the program:

- **Ron Boschma** (Utrecht University/Lund): The concept of resilience
- **Mila Davids** (Eindhoven University of Technology): 'Local meets global': Resilience in Dutch and Taiwanese high tech regions'
- **Rolv Petter Amdam** (BI Norwegian Business School) and **Ove Bjarnar** (Molde University College): 'The development of resilience in a Norwegian maritime region'.
- **Otto Raspe** (PBL Neth. Environmental Assessment Agency): Variables of regional development and the role of economic policies
- **Sandrine Labory** (University of Ferrara): Regional Resilience: lessons from historical analysis of industrial policy in the Emilia-Romagna Region in Italy
- **Raffaele Giardino** (Regione Emilia-Romagna) and **Alberto Rinaldi** (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia): 'Resilient industrial districts in Italy: the case of Emilia-Romagna'.
- **Robin Philips** (Int. Institute Social History): Exploring the effects of long-term industrialization on unemployment and economic growth in Belgium and the Netherlands
- **Emil Evenhuis** (Cambridge): New Directions in Researching Regional Economic Resilience and Adaptation
- **Ramon Ramon-Muñoz** (University of Barcelona): 'Exploring resilience in agri-food clusters during globalization and deglobalization periods: evidence from Catalonia'.
- **Ronald Plantinga & Marijn Molema** (Fryske Akademy): 'Learning in the Dutch-Frisian dairy cluster, c. 1960-2010'