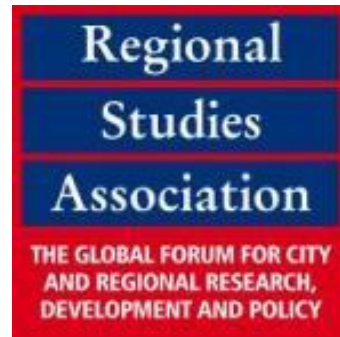




TRAVEL GRANT

EVENT REPORT



FULL NAME	Neil Lee
DATE AND PLACE OF EVENT COVERED BY THE RSA TRAVEL GRANT	Building Blocks event will be held on the 17th of February 2012 at Columbia University in New York.
TITLE OF PRESENTATION	
EMAIL ADDRESS	n.lee1@lancs.ac.uk

I. Please write the event report below (300 words minimum)

Innovation isn't a goal in itself, but a means to growth, welfare and employment. Yet the distribution of the gains from innovation, and their how these are manifest spatially, are less often considered. Who gains from innovation, why and where?

To consider these questions, Columbia University's Technological Change Lab – led by Professor Smita Srinivas – held a one-day conference in partnership with UN HABITAT. Speakers included Robert Beauregard from Columbia, Luciana Pereira from the Universidade Federal do ABC and Cecilia Martinez, Director of the UN Habitat New York office.

Some speakers focused on the difficulty of achieving innovation led growth. Maria Gotsch, from the New York City Investment Fund, outlined how the fund aimed to 'reduce the friction' and ease relationships between entrepreneurs and investors. From Columbia Ventures (the tech transfer office), Daniel Abraham demonstrated the extraordinary revenue which could be made: one set of patents from the 1980s had raised \$790 million for the University.

Yet others were concerned about the role of technology transfer offices, suggesting they were acting as gatekeepers rather than gateways. And Carlos Martinez-Vela from the John Adams Innovation Institute set out some other policy failings: spreading best practice without challenging it, a lack of nuanced thinking from policymakers on innovation policy and the failure to consider local context when it is applied.

Others were concerned about the unequal distribution of the gains from innovation. Luciana Pereira

highlighted the contrast between innovative sectors in Sao Paolo and nearby slums. In my presentation, I argued that innovative cities in the UK – such as Oxford or Cambridge – often had planning restrictions which limited the extent to which the low skilled could move to these cities and gain from growth.

But others were more optimistic about how technology could be used to empower growth. Greta Byrum from the New America Institute showed how technology in Detroit could be used to provide public services in Detroit, famously suffering from a shrinking population and reduced tax base. Columbia's Jigar Bhatt showed how cheaply available technology was allowing entrepreneurs in Maputo, Mozambique, to provide drinking water to poor customers.

The conference was concluded with the long-view from Professor Richard Nelson: "Economic history suggests economic development driven by innovation has almost invariably been a painful process. Some are left behind, other become even worse off". While most have benefited from technological change, others will lose out. And as technological change continues, we shouldn't be surprised if these tensions worsen.