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**Report on the Third Workshop of the RSA Research Network on  
Regional Economic and Policy History  
“Historical Constructions of Regions and Regionalism”  
Center for Regional Studie, Karlstad University, Sweden  
30-31 October 2017**

**Authors:**



Dr Silke Reeploeg is a Post-doctoral Fellow in History at the Centre for Regional Studies, Department of Political, Historical, Religious and Cultural Studies, Karlstad University, Sweden.



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.



Dr. Sara Svensson is a Research Fellow at the Center for Policy Studies at Central European University, Budapest, Hungary. She has published several articles on institutional development in European cross-border regions.



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

The past plays a crucial role in understanding, developing and implementing regional economic development policies. History reveals path dependencies in regions' economies and informs about the successes and failures of policy instruments. The main objective of the network is to explore what a historic perspective may contribute to regional studies as well as current regional policy making and how approaches and methodologies used by historians can be better integrated in regional studies. The third workshop therefore focused on the role of historical narratives, methods and challenges when it comes to the historical constructions of regions.



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The workshop followed the two previous events in building interdisciplinary connections over a two-day lunch-to-lunch program. Discussions focused on the following questions: Historians tend to work inductively, whereas social science approaches to regional studies are mostly theory driven. How do historians manage the changing role and ‘narrative’ of the nation state relative to old and new regions? What can the changing role of the nation state learn us about the challenges and opportunities for region-building in historical perspective? Which theoretical and methodological tools are necessary for understanding the dynamics of these processes? The two days were divided into guiding themes of narratives, methods and challenges, with the four panels on Geo-Historical Construction of Region, Theoretical Approaches and Challenges, Regionalism and Historical Legacy and Policy History exploring the themes from a wide geographical and theoretical perspective. Papers included case studies from China, Israel, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Sweden and Vietnam.

Three keynote lectures reflected further on individual aspects of both the use of history in the construction of regions and regionalism. Speakers identified significant links between the study of regions as sub-national and trans-national cultural and historical entities, with regions discussed as “Big Localities or Small Nation-states? Reflections on the Study of Regions” (Prof Dr Martin Åberg, Karlstad University, Sweden), “Place making and the cultural value of the arts: making sense of culture-led regeneration in post-industrial regions” (Prof Dr Natasha Vall, Teeside University, UK) and “Nordic regions and the politics of (re-)naming” (Prof Dr Peter Stadius, Helsinki University, Finland). Prof Dr Natasha Vall explored the relationship between cultural history and place making. Exemplified by the Northeast England, she showed how the community arts movements of the 1960s and 1970 preceded and influenced processes of culture-led regeneration in post-industrial regions. Contemporary history shows signs of a continuously use and re-use of cultural symbols, which affect cities of regions. Another keynote lecture provided by Prof Dr Peter Stadius reflected on current trends of global branding, in which older regions (i.e. Scania in the South of Sweden) lost ground to newer constructions (such as the Oresund regions driven forward by the bridge between Copenhagen en Malmö). Another example is the Barentsz Region, constructed in the northern part of Scandinavia since the beginning of the 1990s, which has effectively overshadowed older regional constructions. The lectures together with the presentations thus illuminated important connections between the study of regions as sub-national and trans-national cultural and historical entities.



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Day 1 began with Tomer Dekel, Ben-Gurion University of Negev (BGU), Israel investigating *A Geo-historical Analysis of the Production of the 'Sayig', Israel*, which focused on Bedouin informal and highly poor localities that surround the industrial (mostly Jewish) city of Beer-Sheba. Here (regional) space has often been analyzed within a dichotomy of a State-Bedouins conflict. However, another perspective points to the rising role of other networks, such as Bedouin councils, human rights NGOs, international funds and institutions and nationalist and Islamic movements which all participate in the production of (geo-historical) knowledge, regional identities and insurgent planning and building, litigation and alternative planning. Ekanade Israel (University of Venda, South Africa) discussed the history of the African Union (AU) and the role of African regionalism in the context of globalization. Eva Svensson (Karlstad University) returned the focus to Sweden, with a new research project that aims to investigate the living conditions, economies, strategies, lifestyles and material cultures of subalterns and non-proprietors in different socio-environmental contexts studied from an environmental justice-perspective. Her approach clearly demonstrated the advantages of connecting different historical approaches to examine large scale



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structural changes such as modernization, urbanization, industrialization and environmental degradation.

Localized strategies (both in the sub- and trans-national sense) and uses of the past also emerged as key themes and important elements for region-building for the next panel on *Theoretical Approaches and Challenges*. Eda Acara (Middle East Technical University Ankara), for example, provided a case study from Turkey that connected territorial practices, representations of territory and representational territories. In her paper *From Imperial Frontier to National Heartland: Turkey's Nation-Building in its European Province of Thrace (Trakya), 1920-1940* she showed how history can be used as a prism through which a frontier region is framed as a territorial integral to the nation-state, and even as a showcase for ideologies and ethnic constructions of a new "Turkishness". Clearly, historical construction of regions can take many shapes and forms that range from regions as territorial entities within nation-state building to regionalism as part of the 'spatial turn' in human and social sciences, where terms like *place*, *region*, *landscape* and *territorial identities* are conceptualized and problematized. It follows that we need to understand both the historical context in which relationships across territorial practices, representations of territory and representational territories are framed, as well as the resulting theoretical and administrative practices. Here the paper by Martin Åberg and Thomas Denk aided reflections on some of the theoretical dilemmas that both historians and social scientist encounter when using diachronic approaches. A 'historical turn' in regional studies, they argue, will add explanatory power to theory and analysis by providing a trans-disciplinary 'logic' which can include chronological, but also entangled histories that follow the back-and-forth movements of cultural transfer.

Day 2 connected issues around regionalism, historical legacy and policy histories. Mikolaj Herbst, Piotr W Wójcik from the Educational Research Institute Warsaw, for example, provided a fascinating investigation of the effect of 19th century partition of Poland on the present regional divergence in educational outcomes. Whether in a bottom-top or top-down sense, regionalism clearly involves dimensions and processes which theoretically, extend beyond the nation state, but also incorporate historical aspects of the nation state itself. Also closely tied to these processes is the construction and reconstruction of regional identities on basis of perceived legacies and heritage. Here papers by Peter Olausson (Karlstad University) and Dag Hundstad (Høgskulen i Volda) provided Nordic perspectives on constructions of cultural border regions and Norwegian regionalism. Moving on to regionalism within the framework of the EU the panel on policy history demonstrated entirely new mechanisms for managing space, regional planning, and institutions. Duy Pham (Szent István University, Hungary), Haiyan Lu (University of Delft) and Okunade Samuel Kehinde (University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa) closed Day 2 with a series of non-European case studies that explored the more recent policy histories of macro- and city-regions.



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Their papers demonstrated that history also plays a role in enhancing the competitiveness of regions and that regional policies can have important effects on social cohesion and economic growth. Day 2 closed with a discussion on a publication strategy for the network, which will now be agreed upon by network members, with a view to making a selection of the papers presented so far available via a special issue during 2018. **The fourth RSA ReHi workshop will take place at Leeuwarden, Netherlands on 15 and 16 January 2018 under the title of “An historical account of regional resilience”.** For further information see: <http://www.regionalstudies.org/events/>



Group photo, from left to right: (back row) Tomer Dekel (Ben-Gurion University of Negev, Israel), Eda Acara (Middle East Technical University Ankara, Turkey), Natasha Vall (Teeside University, UK), Catarina Karlsson (Jernkontoret, Sweden), Mark Magnuson (Karlstad University, Sweden), Martin Åberg (Karlstad University, Sweden), Thomas Denk (Örebro University, Sweden), (middle row) Peter Olausson (Karlstad University, Sweden), Dag Hundstad (Høgskulen i Volda, Norway), Haiyan Lu (University of Delft, Netherlands), (front row) Duy Pham (Szent István University, Hungary), Sara Svensson (Central European University, Budapest, Hungary), Marijn Molema (Fryske Akademy Leeuwarden/Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences), Mikolaj Herbst, Educational Research Institute Warsaw, Poland).



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### Overview of presentations in order of the program:

Tomer Dekel, Ben-Gurion University of Negev (BGU), Israel: *A Geo-historical Analysis of the Production of the 'Sayig', Israel*

Ekanade Israel, University of Venda, South Africa: *African Union Regionalism in the Light of Globalization*

Eva Svensson, Karlstad University, Sweden: *Environmental Justice and Historical Archaeology of the Subaltern – Local Strategies in a Globalized World*

Anders Forsell, Stefan Backius, Karlstad University, Sweden: *Emotional Heritage*

Eda Acara, Middle East Technical University Ankara, Turkey: *From Imperial Frontier to National Heartland: Turkey's Nation-Building in its European Province of Thrace (Trakya), 1920-1940*

Martin Åberg, Karlstad University, Thomas Denk, Örebro University, Sweden: *Dilemmas of Diachronic Approaches: Time as a Unit of Analysis in Regional Studies*

Peter Olausson, Karlstad University, Sweden: *Researchers as Constructors of Cultural Border Regions? A Swedish-Norwegian Example of Role Conflicts of Historians*

Dag Hundstad, Høgskulen i Volda, Norway: *Norwegian Regionalism – between Particularism and National Integration*

Mark Magnuson, Karlstad University, Sweden: *The Distance and Burden of Debt: Financial Strategies among aging Small Holders in Gräsmark, Värmland, 1880-1910*

Mikolaj Herbst, Piotr W Wójcik, Educational Research Institute Warsaw, Poland: *The legacy of the fallen empires and regional differences in educational outcomes*

Duy Pham, Szent István University, Hungary: *Macro-region Strategies and Administrative Traditions in a Comparison Perspective in EU and some lessons for Vietnam*

Haiyan Lu, Martin de Jong, University of Delft, Netherlands: *The Impact of Ecological Modernization of Regional and City Positioning in the Pear River Delta in China – a historical perspective*

Okunade Samuel Kehinde, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa: *Lackadaisical Collaboration in West African Sub-Region: How should Ecowas react?*