

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS - RSA POLICY EXPO 2021

Social Innovation, Foundational Sectors and the Regional Economy

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the 'Foundational Economy' (FE) i.e. those sectors which provide the essential (and largely collective) goods and services that comprise everyday life. These include so-called 'mundane' service sectors such as health, education, social care, energy and food. In many regions – especially lagging regions – such activities have long comprised the major part of the local economy. Yet, conventional innovation policy has largely utilised a traditional Science and Technology model with an emphasis upon a narrow band of 'high tech' sectors, often to the detriment of foundational activities.

In recent years, policymakers at both national and supranational levels, have begun to identify grand societal challenges such as renewable energy, food security, climate change/clean growth, future of mobility, healthy ageing, and health response systems (EC, 2010). By definition, these societal challenges largely affect the foundational sectors. Addressing such challenges is likely to be a multi-dimensional process, which necessitates both *technological* and *social innovation*, and involving a wide set of stakeholders (*firms, researchers, consumers/users and citizens*) in co-producing new knowledge and experimentation with new ideas. While solutions to these challenges will have a global application, there are clear opportunities to undertake the research and experimentation process in an inclusive way at local and regional levels.

For instance, regional foundational activities can facilitate social innovation processes and act as a conduit for co-production. This may arise through experimental platforms and interdisciplinary living labs with researchers working in concert with private, public and third sector actors. Regional policy initiatives (*e.g. UK Local industrial strategies*) and key regional anchors (*e.g. HE institutions/Healthcare providers*) can play a key role in facilitating this process. In doing so, this may enable place-based policies (*such as Smart Specialisation*) to identify and support more opportunities in lagging regions.

This RSA Policy Expo Call seeks proposals that explore the growing importance of the Foundational Economy and social innovation within regional economies, and hitherto the role of regional policies to take advantage of these opportunities.

Some key issues that could be addressed, but are not limited include:

- How might place based policies (*such as Smart Specialisation*) support social innovation and enhance regional foundational sectors?
- The role of regional anchors in promoting social innovation, foundational sectors and addressing societal challenges.
- Comparative Case studies and policy lessons from regional initiatives to promote social innovation
- Evaluating social innovation – what metrics are useful or are required to ensure social innovation policies meet their objectives?
- The re-orientation of foundational sectors as the basis for inclusive regional growth