

## RESEARCH NETWORK GRANT SCHEME (RN) Event Report Form

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Events and research network reports for Regions eZine- <https://regions.regionalstudies.org/>  
In order to publish your report in Regions eZine, we would request that your report outlines the key discussions occurring during the event and how these discussions contribute to the scholarship and readership of the regional studies community. We would value linkages being made between the take-away messages of the event and the current literature, for instance from open access articles published in one or more [publications of the Regional Studies Association](#).

Alternatively, more general description of the event can be submitted for publication on our website.

PLEASE INDICATE IF YOU ARE SUBMITTING THIS REPORT TO REGIONS OR FOR OUR WEBSITE: This report is for the RSA Website

RESEARCH NETWORK TITLE: **Regional Studies Association Research Network on Infrastructural Regionalism (NOIR)**

EVENT TITLE: **Inclusive Infrastructures and the Dynamics of Regional Transformation**

DATE AND PLACE OF EVENT: 6-9 May 2025, Porto, Portugal – 2025 Regional Studies Association Annual Conference

ORGANISER(S)' NAME(S): Michael Glass and Jen Nelles

### PLEASE PROVIDE US WITH DETAILS OF YOUR EVENT

- **What was the aim of this event?**

This session evaluated the relationships between inclusive regional transformation and infrastructure investment. A recent OECD report on 'inclusive infrastructure' argues that infrastructure is fundamental for fostering regional economic development and wellbeing, and that contemporary policy should look to closing 'infrastructure investment gaps' that exacerbate regional inequality (OECD 2024). Thinking regionally about infrastructure provides a framework to understand how infrastructural development and regional space are interlinked, and how they combine to shape new regional futures. We invited papers that evaluate the relationships between infrastructural investment, inclusiveness, and regional growth, covering themes including:

- The role of multi-scalar governance in supporting infrastructure projects that enhance long-term development plans with community aspirations. What are the planning tools and frameworks that ensure beneficial community consequences of investment?
- The capacity of public-private partnerships to coordinate for beneficial outcomes across the regional scale. How are projects delivered that comport with the needs of local communities?

- Conceptual approaches to understanding the intersections between infrastructural investment and inclusive growth. Can infrastructure be inclusive?
- Case studies and comparative analysis of regional infrastructure projects that were effective in surmounting notable investment gaps.
- **How many people attended (speakers and delegates) the event? Please add an approximate number of countries.**

The NOIR special session was attended by 15 people, with presenters and co-authors coming from China, Colombia, France, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

- **Please list the speakers of the event and title of their presentations (please give a description of how and why these papers were selected).**

***SS23: Inclusive Infrastructures and the Dynamics of Regional Transformation***

- **Carlos Cadena-Gaitan**, *EAFIT University* and **Diane Morales**, *University of Oslo* (presenting for co-authors **David Marlow**, **Louise Kempton**, and **Michael Glass**): “Inclusive Innovation: Definitions, Challenges and Innovation Districts”
- **Michael Glass**, *University of Pittsburgh* (presenting for co-author **David Waite**): “Evaluating Emergent City-Regionalism through Infrastructure: A Case for Livability, Growth, or Both?”
- **Matias Chamboleyron**, *Laboratoire Médiations - Sorbonne Université*, “1,000 km of opportunity or obstacle? The regional contradictions of the Carajás railway”

The papers were selected from a pool of submissions to an open call, given their focus on, and engagement with, questions of regional infrastructure and infrastructural regionalism. We paid particular attention to issues of disciplinary and topic diversity, as well as looking to include presentations from early career researchers.

- **Please send us the program and outline of your event.**

See the RSA Annual Conference program.

- **Please describe any social activities organised as part of the event.**

Informal drinks and discussion followed the session.

- **Please provide us with conclusions of the event (how it contributed to the overall aim of the network and an outline of the key discussions occurring during the event).**

The session featured presentations on inclusive innovation and innovation districts, emergent city regionalism through rail and housing infrastructure in Auckland, and on the regional contradictions posed by a Brazilian freight railway. These rich presentations shared important insights that will continue to shape discussions about the equity impacts of infrastructure and how infrastructure might mitigate these.

When we started this network, we specifically decided not to restrict our focus to a single definition of a region. This is partly because, in the course of our research, we have all adopted slightly different regional lenses but also because we wanted to allow ourselves and our membership to explore the topic without restrictions. Whatever the definition employed, however, we encouraged participants in the network and our events to consider how these definitions shape infrastructure and how infrastructure itself can shape perceptions (and institutionalization) of regionalisms. The presentations in this session engaged with three very different regional imaginaries. Glass’s presentation focused

most specifically on an institutionalized region – the Super City city-region of Auckland – arguing that even though one of the ambitions of the Super City was to increase the efficiency of regional transportation planning there are some doubts as to whether regional priorities are being appropriately integrated into what appear to be city-centric expansion plans. The region Chamboleyron presented was not an administrative construction, but a regional territory set on the spine of the Carajás railway in Brazil between the mines in Parauapebas and the port of São Luís. This presentation questioned the degree to which this region adequately benefits from the rail line beyond mineral exports, concluding that, in its present form, it creates more obstacle than opportunity. Cadena-Gaitan et al's contribution was a comparative interrogation of the hyper-local innovation infrastructure of innovation districts in four urban contexts. Here the regional was implicit, as innovation districts are often woven into narratives about expanding regional innovation capabilities. Their research interrogated the localized impacts of innovation infrastructure often designed to serve regional interests and minimizing scrutiny of their impact on local communities.

In their critical approach to innovation infrastructure, Cadena-Gaitan et al. highlighted that inclusiveness was often part of the design of innovation districts but demonstrated very different track records to date in aligning the benefits with the needs of the adjacent, often historically marginalized communities. In considering this, I wondered whether part of the challenge might involve how inclusiveness is framed and, therefore, implemented as part of these projects. A recent analysis of innovation and economic policies in the UK showed that sustainable innovation is often framed in terms of economic benefit. The result is that while these policies use the “right” language, there is little prioritization of sustainability beyond advancing (or mitigating impact on) economic goals. As a result, where there is an attempt to maintain accountability, success is declared if the stated economic results were obtained (or in progress) while much less attention is paid to other equity or inclusion consequences of investment. It would be interesting to interrogate the inclusion narratives in these projects to explore the degree to which they are equally ambitious and meaningful in their efforts and execution beyond economic results. This is also worth exploring in the Auckland city-region, where the City Rail Link (CRL) project provides a technical fix to land use pressures and the affordability crisis but appears to be disconnected from the housing solutions tackling the same issues. Here there may be different perspectives of which inclusion challenges are the highest priorities and which “fixes” will be most effective that are tied to how the region is perceived and who gets to do the seeing.

The Auckland case is interesting as an example of an attempt to align governance with the geographies of infrastructure in order to better plan and manage the system. Improving transportation planning effectiveness was one of three explicit goals of metropolitan reform and the inclusion of all of the previously fragmented communities along the rail line was seen as crucial to enabling that ambition. Fifteen years on, however, territorial divisions persist within the amalgamated structures. While it does not invalidate the idea that efficiencies can be extracted from aligning institutional boundaries with regional infrastructures, this case does demonstrate that institutional fixes may not be a magic bullet to overcome challenges associated with regional fragmentation. Indeed, forcing communities together in top-down arrangements may exacerbate parochialism by denying actors within the structure independence to make deals. This raises questions for scholars of infrastructural regionalism and governance about which institutional structures and strategies are most effective in overcoming fragmentation. When effectiveness is viewed not only in operational terms, but through a lens of (regional) inclusion, further challenges become evident. Through this we return to a perennial question for our network of which actors get to “see” like a region, and which version of the region should be prioritized in infrastructure agendas.

There is little doubt that infrastructure can play an important role in both creating and mitigating inequalities. All of the presentations highlighted equity challenges, to local communities around innovation districts, to regional land use and housing affordability, and to cities and territories underserved by a private rail line. What is most interesting was that solutions (and work arounds) always seemed to be emerging around not one, but several, infrastructural fixes. In Brazil, roads and truck transport serve the communities not being served by the rail line, with attendant infrastructural

and sustainability consequences. In Auckland, housing and rail are not effectively aligned, but provide competing (?) approaches to the problem of affordably housing (and moving) a metropolitan population. Innovation districts demonstrate that innovation infrastructure cannot promote inclusiveness (or innovation) effectively without incorporating displacement mitigation strategies, energy use considerations, or links appropriate links to digital and physical networks. As such, there is perhaps an interesting thread to pursue about the intersections and alignments of infrastructural fixes and how different perceptions of regionalism, and different governance coalitions, clash or become complementary at that interface.

- **Please outline any future actions (planned events, outputs, follow-up of the event, publications).**

Event recaps for the 2024 RSA Winter, 2025 AAG, and 2025 RSA conference events have been posted on the NOIR website and shared via the Networks social media accounts. We are currently strategizing publications options based on NOIR 2.0's first three events and we are keen to leverage the insights of these initial conversations into collective outputs. Towards this end, we are now developing plans for a Network collaborative writing workshop to align with the 2026 RSA Annual Conference. In addition, future thematic panels under consideration for the 2025 RSA Winter Conference and 2026 RSA Annual Conference, centring on issues including innovation infrastructures, governance arrangements, and regional blue infrastructure.

- **Please outline below how you promoted the Association at your event and whether any follow up actions are planned.**

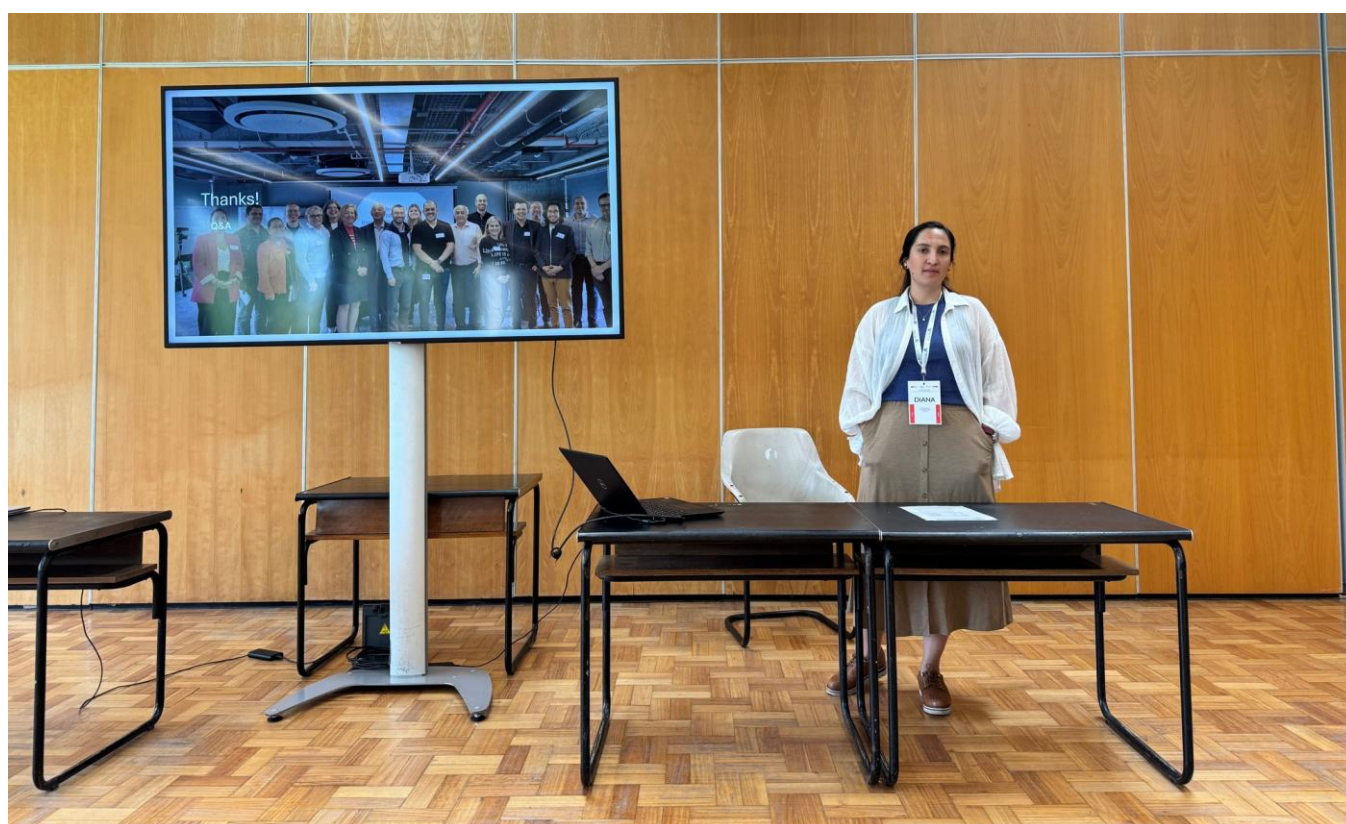
At the outset of the special paper sessions, NOIR's co-ordinators acknowledged the financial and logistical support provided by the RSA and encourage those attending the sessions to consider applying for RSA Research Network grants in future rounds. The RSA logo was featured on PowerPoint slides from the NOIR team. We have sent a follow-up email to the session presenters, which included the below information regarding the RSA e-bulletin.

- **Please include a short biography from/on behalf of the author of this report (author's title, institutional affiliation, and research interests, max 40 words) and attach an ID picture (this may be published in *Regions*) in Jpeg format.**

Jen Nelles is Senior Research Fellow with the Innovation Caucus and Co-Director of the Oxford Regions, Innovation, and Enterprise Lab (ORIEL) at Oxford Brookes Business School. She specializes in innovation and productivity policy, urban and metropolitan governance, regional economic development, infrastructure, and system dynamics.

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- **Please send an email addressed to [researchnetwork@regionalstudies.org](mailto:researchnetwork@regionalstudies.org) attaching any presentation or additional material that you have permission to display on the Association's website.**
- **Please confirm that you have either provided the RSA with a list of delegates' emails or that you have sent an email to the delegates containing a paragraph on the RSA and the link to sign up to the e-Bulletin as follows:**
  - The Regional Studies Association (RSA) is a learned society concerned with the analysis of regions and regional issues. It is the multidisciplinary global community for regional and urban research, development and policy. An RSA membership gives you access to publications, funding opportunities, conferences and events, networking opportunities, discounts and much more. The RSA sends out news on its activities and deadlines via its monthly newsletter, so if you have not yet signed up to the monthly e-Bulletin, please do so [here](#).





Carlos Cadena-Gaitan (EAFIT University – top) and Diane Morales (University of Oslo – bottom) presenting collaborative research on inclusive innovation and innovation districts.





NOIR Co-Director Michael Glass (University of Pittsburgh) presenting on emergent city regionalism through rail and housing infrastructure in Auckland



Matias Chamboleyron (Sorbonne University) discusses the regional contradictions posed by a Brazilian freight railway.