

Entrepreneurial and Innovation Ecosystems in the UK and Japan: Special Sessions at the [Regional Studies Association Winter Conference](#) (RSA) Winter conference in London

Entrepreneurial ecosystems have emerged as one of the most popular economic development policies in the last decade, and has become a major focus for entrepreneurship research. However, neither research nor policy has given sufficient recognition to 'place'. In view of geographical differences in the strength of entrepreneurial ecosystems, "one-size fits all" and "top-down" approaches to the ecosystem model are inappropriate and ineffective and risk widening existing disparities across regions and localities. In order to share research interests and policy issues across different national contexts, supported by the **ESRC UK-Japan Connections Grant**, the project team organised [two international policy-research workshops](#) in Glasgow and Tokyo in 2019.

Building on this, we organised a special session, '**Understanding the Configurations of Place-based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: New Conceptual and Methodological Approaches**' (SS4) at the [Regional Studies Association Winter Conference](#) (#RSAWinter) in London, 14–15 November 2019.

We invited wider contributions beyond the geographical scopes of the UK and Japan, and accepted 12 papers, which were presented across three sub-sessions (Chaired by **Ben Spiegel** and **Fumi Kitagawa** from University of Edinburgh; and **Christian Gherhes**, University of Sheffield):

- i) **Place-Based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Overview and Policy Issues**
- ii) **Understanding Place-Based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Methodological Approaches**
- iii) **Looking Into Place-Based Entrepreneurial Ecosystems: Conceptual Development**

The first session focused on the complex nature of place-based policies operating in the diverse ecosystems. **Jonathan Potter** ([Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities](#), the OECD), presented the OECD project applying the entrepreneurial ecosystem and industrial path development concepts across several countries (e.g. Poland, the UK, and Thailand) and pointed out the difficulties of responding to different policy demands such as improving SME innovation as well as supporting start-up and scale ups. **Ruxandra Jianu** (University of Sheffield) presented her work on Polish entrepreneurial ecosystems introducing the concept of 'opportunistic multi-level governance', whereby the national government is using regions to obtain funding in the framework of smart specialisation without developing an understanding of regional ecosystem needs. **Dimitri Corpakis** (former EU official) articulated the potential of smart specialization arguing that it could provide a pathway to a new industrial strategy. **Fumi Kitagawa** (University of Edinburgh) with **Daniel Prokop** (Cardiff University) and **Andrew Stevens** at the [Japan Local Government Centre](#)

(JLGC) in London, presented findings from the UK-Japan project, about the increasingly spatially focused innovation and industrial policy in Japan, with a recent government policy focus to embrace entrepreneurial ecosystems at a city level.

The second session unpacked the mechanisms of place-based entrepreneurial ecosystems with a variety of methodological approaches. **Ben Spiegel** (University of Edinburgh) presented his ongoing research using LinkedIn as a data source, and highlighted varying degrees of 'cohesion' and 'nestedness' of 'Fin-Tech' ecosystems in four cities in the UK. **Susann Schaefer** (Friedrich Schiller University) shared her research on Israeli high-tech entrepreneurs in London and Berlin, highlighting different institutional and cultural environments surrounding the migrant entrepreneurs in the two cities. **Anne Green** (University of Birmingham) presented an evaluation of a business support programme on a local workforce development interacting with small businesses and a number of stakeholders in the UK. **Udo Brixy** (Institute for Employment Research, Germany) using large quantitative data sets analysed hiring practices by start-ups in relation to the regional labour market, in particular highlighting new firms' impact on employment across regions with different levels of unemployment.

The third session further deepened conceptual and methodological discussions on ecosystem approaches, drawing on four ongoing research projects by doctoral and early career researchers looking at very different entrepreneurial ecosystems. **Laura Bennett** (University of Sheffield) presented findings from her PhD research on Bristol's high growth entrepreneurial ecosystem highlighting the connectivity in the city-region. **Meiling Hong** (Ningbo University of Finance & Economics, China) presented her research in Shenzhen, China illuminating two institutional logics of entrepreneurial ecosystems at work. **Fizza Khalid Chaudhry** (University of Edinburgh) discussed the many roles that accelerators can play in developing an entrepreneurial ecosystem, drawing on her study in Pakistan. **Dina Ashour** (University of Edinburgh) presented an entrepreneurial ecosystem development in Egypt focusing on how entrepreneurs employ social capital in the context of an emerging economy.

The special session as a whole highlighted the challenges of researching diverse and dynamic configurations of 'place-based' entrepreneurial ecosystems and the different roles played by the variety of actors involved. We came to realise that a more granulated understanding of ecosystem thinking is required, with greater consideration of the institutional changes given the heterogeneous nature of places and complex interactions between actors and networks. The set of three sub-sessions during the conference enhanced our cross-ecosystem learning across different countries with a diverse set of methodologies.

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