

**RSA Research Network on Bridging Governance Gaps in City-Regions: Addressing Land Take and City-Region Building Through Comparative Research
Event Report Form**

Session: CS2 “Governance and Imaginaries of Sustainable City Regions”
2025 RSA Regional Futures Conference,
13- 14 November 2025

Session Organisers: Anna Growe, Kassel University, Germany & Eva Purkarthofer, Aalto University, Finland.



The special session inaugurated the newly established RSA Research Network “Bridging Governance Gaps in City-Regions: Addressing Land Take and City-Region Building Through Comparative Research” and created a platform for sustained collaboration over the next three years. Thus, the session aimed to (1) strengthen the networks visibility within the scientific community and (2) systematically advance a shared research agenda structured around three interrelated themes: city-regions as functionally integrated spaces; planning strategies to reduce land take; and the perception of city-regions as political and planning spaces for collective action.

While global policy goals like SDG 11 emphasize sustainable urban development, the most tangible indicator of these ambitions—land take—extends far beyond core cities. It is deeply embedded in the socio-economic dynamics of functionally integrated city-regions, reaching into their suburban and even peripheral areas. Consequently, the realization of “no net land take” as a planning and policy goal is not a challenge for individual municipalities but for city-regions as a whole. Yet, institutional fragmentation and conceptual limitations continue to weaken city-regions as coherent spaces for action. These mismatches between functional interdependencies, planning frameworks, and political geographies undermine sustainability ambitions and call for renewed academic attention.

This session initiates the thematic exploration of a research triangle:

1. Identifying city-regions as functionally integrated spaces
2. Governance and planning to increase sustainable land use strategies in city-regions
3. Perceptions of city-regions as political-planning spaces for action



Session 1 – Focus on Governance and Imaginaries

Planning with extended urbanization: Elements of a strategic spatial planning vocabulary

Nicholas A. Phelps (University of Melbourne, Australia)

Roger Keil (York University, Canada)

Paul Maginn, (University of Western Australia, Australia)

Tony Matthews (Griffith University, Australia)

David C. Valler (Oxford Brookes University, UK)

City-Regional Transformation Through Cohesion, Canvas, and Constructs: A Comparative Analysis of Inter-Municipal Adaptation Processes in Germany

Lukas Häfner (Kassel University, Germany)

Anna Growe (Kassel University, Germany)

‘Nine dragons rule the regions’: the challenge of integrated regional development in China

John Harrison (Loughborough University, UK)

Dongxin Lian (South China University of Technology, China)

Hao Gu (Hunan University, China)

Shifu Wang (South China University of Technology, China)

From Flexibility to Formality: Rethinking Planning Governance for Managing Land Take in Polish City-Regions

Łukasz Mikuła (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poland)

Between suburb and city: conceptualising interplaces’

Wander Demuynck (KU Leuven, Belgium)

Ben Derudder (KU Leuven, Belgium)

Evert Meijers (Utrecht University, The Netherlands)

Michiel Van Meeteren (Utrecht University, The Netherlands)

Session 2 – Focus on Net-Land-Take and Urban-Rural Interrelations

Regional planning for no net land take: Designing strategic planning processes in peri-urban Austria

Philip Krassnitzer (University of Vienna, Austria)

Urban-rural coordination in local planning: Comparing multi-level planning governance in the Brescia and Kassel city-regions

Theresia Morandell (ETH Zurich, Switzerland)

Rural transformation and multi-scalar livelihood strategies under city-regional environmental governance: Evidence from 43 villages in the Yangtze River Delta metropolitan region, China

Simin Yan (Kassel University, Germany)

Chen Chen (Tongji University, China)

No net loss policies for biodiversity and land: synergies and trade-offs

Bernadeta Baroková (Charles University, Czechia)

Greening at the Margins: Cross-Border Mangrove Governance in the Greater Bay Area
Yunjie Zhang (Harvard University, USA) [did not attend the conference]

The special session effectively marked the launch of the network by bringing together a diverse set of contributions that collectively advanced its core objective: linking debates on city-regional governance, land take, and spatial imaginaries. It strengthened the network's visibility within the RSA community and established a shared problem framing, namely that land take cannot be addressed without conceptualising and governing city-regions as functionally integrated spaces. Several contributions, e.g. by Nicholas A. Phelps and Lukas Häfner, explicitly demonstrated how conceptual vocabularies and governance dynamics shape the way city-regions are understood and acted upon.

A strong common thread across the papers is the identification of a structural mismatch between functional urbanisation processes and existing governance arrangements. Contributions by John Harrison and Łukasz Miłucha, for instance, highlighted how overlapping competencies, fragmented institutional landscapes, and competing spatial imaginaries impede coordinated action at the city-regional scale. Similarly, papers in the second strand, such as those by Philip Krassnitzer and Theresia Morandell, showed that these governance gaps directly translate into limited effectiveness of planning instruments aimed at reducing land take, particularly in peri-urban contexts.

At the same time, the session underscored significant cross-case differences that are analytically productive for future comparative research. The contributions revealed varying degrees of institutionalisation—from more formalised and legally embedded systems (e.g. in parts of Germany or emerging frameworks in Poland) to flexible or fragmented arrangements, as discussed by Simin Yan in the Chinese context. Differences also emerged in how city-regions are imagined and operationalised, ranging from coherent strategic constructs to contested and overlapping spatial configurations, as illustrated in the work of Wander Demuyneck. These variations have direct implications for how land take and urban-rural interrelations are governed.

Overall, the discussions highlighted the added value of integrating perspectives from planning, political science, and economic geography. By juxtaposing cases and conceptual approaches, the session laid the groundwork for a more systematic comparative research agenda that captures both shared structural challenges and context-specific trajectories. This directly contributes to the network's long-term aim of developing methodological innovations and advancing a more differentiated understanding of how governance, imaginaries, and land-use dynamics interact across city-regions.