

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

*Session: CS04 “Beyond Fragmentation New Institutions and Strategies for Urban-Rural Linkages”
2026 RSA Annual Conference, Gothenburg, Sweden.*

15–18 June 2026

Session Organisers: Alois Humer, TU Wien, Austria; Simin Yan, Chongqing University, China, Lukas Häfner, University of Kassel, Germany

Session Chair: Ben Derudder

The special session formed part of the RSA Research Network “*Bridging Governance Gaps in City-Regions: Addressing Land Take and City-Region Building Through Comparative Research*” agenda and followed the inaugural session at the 2025 RSA Regional Futures Conference. 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.

Bridging economic, social, and environmental divides across territories is essential to achieving inclusive, resilient, and sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11, UN, 2025). Urban–rural linkages represent the flows of people, resources, goods and services between urban centres and their surrounding rural areas. Governing these linkages amid territorial fragmentation in city-regions and cross-border settings has resulted in complex, multi-level governance arrangements. These arrangements, however, are often challenged by overlapping jurisdictions, misaligned policies, and uneven fiscal and administrative capacities. This special session therefore explores strategies to improve the governance of urban–rural linkages and address the challenges of territorial fragmentation.

The session focused on the thematic exploration of the following questions:

1. What challenges arise from administrative and socio-economic fragmentation for the governance of urban–rural linkages?
2. Which strategies and policy frameworks strengthen the governance of urban–rural linkages across fragmented territories?

The following presentations were held:

1. Simin Yan, Assistant Researcher, Chongqing University: “Bridging Governance Gaps in City-Regions: Promoting Discourse and Comparative Research on Land Take and City-Region Building” (*presented by Lukas Häfner on behalf of Simin Yan*)
2. Florian Albrecht, Kassel University: “Navigating Agglomeration Pressures and Emerging Inequalities in Interlinked Metropolitan Regions: Governance Responses in Rhine-Main and Rhine-Neckar”
3. Eliška Vejchodská, Associate Professor, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University: “Biodiversity, Land and Housing under Competing Public Interests: Rural Development in Protected Areas of Czechia”
4. Wander Demuyne, PhD Candidate, KU Leuven & Utrecht University: “In-between Politics: Interplaces as Discursive Brokers in Fragmented Metropolitan Transport Governance”
5. Lukas Häfner, Research Assistant, University of Kassel: Working Across Borders: Local Authorities and Inter-Municipal Settlement Development in Germany

Following an introductory presentation by Lukas Häfner on behalf of Simin Yan, the contributions explored different dimensions of governance and spatial development in city-regions.



Florian Albrecht and Eliška Vejchodská highlighted how socially and ecologically defined spatial boundaries require differentiated approaches in both research and policymaking. Drawing on commuter data comprising more than 300,000 network edges, Albrecht demonstrated how mobility flows transcend administrative boundaries while reinforcing spatial concentration within urbanised areas. Vejchodská examined recent shifts in housing and spatial development policies, highlighting their limited consideration of urban–rural interdependencies and the resulting tensions between housing development, land consumption, and biodiversity targets.

The presentations by Wander Demuynck and Lukas Häfner focused on strategies to overcome administrative and spatial fragmentation. Demuynck emphasised the role of “interplaces” as discursive brokers that shape spatial imaginaries within fragmented metropolitan governance, while Häfner presented findings on how municipalities navigate spatial, actor-related, and institutional challenges through different forms of inter-municipal cooperation.

Overall, the session demonstrated the value of cross-sectoral and comparative perspectives. By bringing together diverse empirical cases and conceptual approaches, participants bridged discursive and material perspectives, territorial and sectoral research focusses, as well as functional analyses and their political implications. The discussion further contributed to the network’s long-term objective of advancing comparative research on the interactions between governance, spatial imaginaries, and land-use dynamics across city-regions.