



new deadline for abstracts: September 6, 2010

Research Network on

Virtualisation of space through inter-regional networks

Call for papers

1st Workshop:

4 - 5 October 2010

Firenze, Italy

Aims of the Research Network

This research network is established as a follow-up of the previous research network on “Sub-national collaboration for regional development: the role of networking among regions”, proposed by professors Nicola Bellini (Sant’Anna School, Pisa, and IRPET, Firenze, Italy) and Ulrich Hilpert (Jena University, Germany) and approved by the Regional Studies Association with the aim of promoting a network of scholars and practitioners interested in analyzing and providing an appropriate theoretical framework to analyse the increasing collaboration among regions. The network held three workshops in Pisa, Jena and Brussels in 2008-09 and some of the ideas and papers presented are part of the book “*Europe’s Changing Geography*” which is currently finalised by the editors. Further details on our previous work can be found at:

<http://www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/research-networks/past/sncrd.asp>

The network has been renewed with the aim of analyzing and discussing inter-regional networks involving regional actors belonging to different countries and their implications for theory and policy. **In particular the hypothesis of a "virtualization" of the space for collaborative policies should be put to test.**

Of course, regional governments desire development which takes place within their own territory. However economic and social development, innovation, employment, environmental improvements etc. often tend to be generated collaboratively, based on working with partners who are located at different locations which are often physically far apart. In fact, **while cross-border relations are still one very relevant option in interregional cooperation, networks increasingly tend to involve regions that share a certain policy priority, independently of its physical location.**

Geographical proximity becomes less important. A different kind of proximity (a "virtual proximity") emerges: distant regions become linked through innovative collaboration and the exchange of expertise. These collaborations are close and oriented towards shared goals, so that there is a virtualisation of space integral to these processes. This does not mean that proximity becomes absolutely irrelevant, but that it may be complemented or substituted by new "virtual" proximities in particular situations that need to be identified.

The workshop is open to all contribution which touches this area of research. Nevertheless, we see the following **possible research questions** as appropriate for this workshop:

- What are the main drivers of these kinds of collaboration? What is the role of proximity? What is the role (and actual meaning) of complementarity between regions?
- To what extent EU policies are relevant in promoting or shaping this kind of evolution?
- Are similar trends visible in areas other than the EU?
- Are strong and weak regions cooperating? Or do we witness the emergence of "networks of strong regions" vs. "networks of weak regions"?
- How is policy learning and policy transfer taking place within networks?
- How are regional policies shaped by the opportunities linked to networking?
- Are networks leading to some kind of longer-term institutional arrangement? In other words, are new polities emerging? If so, is there a role for Nation States and national systems? Are these new polities alternative or complementary to them?

Further ideas dealing with the topic of this research network are invited!

The first workshop will be held in Florence / Firenze (Italy) and will be organized in cooperation with IRPET, Tuscany's regional institute for economic planning.

Please, send your abstract (up to 500 words) no later than August 25th, 2010 to the research network secretariat (dr. Irene Martinez) at the following address:

RSAresearchnetwork@sssup.it

Abstracts must include full contact details. Applicants will be contacted by September 10th about their submission. Full papers of maximum 10 pages or PPT presentations are requested by September 27th.

Participation in the Research Network and the Firenze workshop is free, but participants must take care of their own travel expenses and accommodation. Limited funds are available to support travel expenses of young researchers and PhD students. Financial support must be requested at the time of the abstract's submission.

Prof. Nicola Bellini

Prof. Ulrich Hilpert