



Going “backwards”? Changing peripheries through youth mobility.

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Abstract

Peripheries, remote and lagging regions, have recently drawn significant attention from regional science scholars. In this context, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognized as key players in supporting the socio-economic development of cities and regions. They contribute by disseminating knowledge beyond academic boundaries, attracting highly skilled human capital, and collaborating with private, public, and non-profit organizations. This role becomes even more critical in peripheral areas, where HEIs act as essential drivers of local development, earning the label of “developers”.

This special session focuses on the role of universities and youth mobility in peripheral regions. While much research has examined the outflows of students from peripheral areas to metropolitan universities, this work emphasizes an often-overlooked phenomenon: counterflows. These include students who choose to remain in or even migrate to peripheral regions. Not all young people from these areas move to large urban universities; some stay, and others migrate between peripheral regions or from urban centers to the periphery. The Special Session aims to broaden the discussion to pursue and deepen previous work on student’s migration and its importance for the revitalisation of the peripheries (Fonseca, 2023; Dal Molin et al., 2025).

This special session invites researchers to present studies—whether advanced or exploratory—on the often-overlooked dynamics of human capital in peripheral regions. The goal is to uncover new and innovative approaches that can inform public policies aimed at fostering sustainable development while promoting social and territorial equity.

We are particularly interested in studies that explore the role of HEIs and human capital in supporting the socio-economic development of the peripheries. Contributions may focus on, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Student and youth counterflows to peripheral regions.
- Different forms of innovation in peripheral areas.
- Second-tier city and peripheral universities as engines of local development and innovation in peripheries.
- Public policies aimed at enhancing the attractiveness of peripheral regions, including case studies of success and failure.

References

Dal Molin, M., Compagnucci, F., & Urso, G. (2025) La geografia dei flussi centro-periferia degli studenti universitari *URBANA. International Journal of Urban Policies and Studies*, forthcoming.

Fonseca, M., 2023. Innovation in the peripheries: Counter-flows of students to second tier cities in Portugal. *Geoforum*, 141, p.103732.