



Special Session Proposal

Regional Inequalities and Development Pathways in Post-Crisis and Post-Transition Economies

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Abstract

Despite decades of cohesion policy, Europe continues to face persistent and, in many regions, widening territorial disparities in income, productivity, demographic dynamics, access to services, innovation capacity, and environmental quality. These disparities are particularly pronounced in post-socialist, peripheral, and transition regions, where structural legacies, institutional weaknesses, demographic decline, and uneven integration into European and global markets create complex development challenges.

This session, proposed by ERSA Serbia, aims to provide a dedicated forum for advancing scientific understanding of regional development patterns and territorial inequalities, with a special focus on post-crisis and post-transition economies as well as evidence-based policy responses capable of fostering convergence, resilience, and sustainable growth. The session will bring together scholars working on theoretical, empirical, and policy-oriented research addressing the drivers, mechanisms, and consequences of regional disparities across Europe and beyond.

We particularly welcome contributions that:

- analyse economic, social, demographic, and environmental dimensions of regional inequality;



- examine the role of institutions, governance, and policy design in shaping regional development outcomes;
- apply advanced quantitative, spatial, and data-driven methods to measure and explain disparities;
- evaluate the effectiveness of cohesion policy, smart specialisation, and place-based development strategies;
- provide insights from post-socialist, Western Balkan, and other structurally lagging regions.

The session seeks to connect regional science theory with real-world policy challenges, encouraging dialogue between academics and practitioners on how to translate analytical results into actionable territorial strategies. By highlighting experiences from both advanced and catching-up regions, the session will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of convergence and divergence processes in Europe and will support the design of more targeted, inclusive, and territorially sensitive development policies.

Through this session, ERSA Serbia aims to strengthen the visibility of research from Southeast Europe within the ERSA community and to foster broader scientific exchange on one of the most pressing issues facing European integration: how to ensure balanced, sustainable, and inclusive regional development.