



Regional Studies Association Research Network on Eco-Social Policy and PRactice for Innovation and Transformation (ESPPRIT)

Timeline March 2024 - March 2027

www.GCHU.org.uk/ESPPRIT

This RSA Research Network ESPPRIT brings together researchers working in the fields of Regional Studies, Urban and Regional Planning, Economic Geography, and Governance and Policy Studies to critically engage with eco-social transformations. By examining changes “from below” through social innovation and “from above” through social policy, the network aims to contribute conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches to identifying pathways for deep-seated transformations.

ESPPRIT Objectives

The overall aim of the network is to foster interdisciplinary discussions on eco-social transformations, following four objectives:

1. Understanding the geographical dimensions of eco-social transformations relating specifically to concepts of the foundational economy, post-growth planning, sustainability transition, sustainable welfare and wellbeing and multi-level governance. We will consider the role of place-based approaches “from the bottom” within local society, “from the top” by national governments or supranational organisations, and “from the middle”, by non-state organisations at national, regional or local levels.

2. Shaping a just eco-social transformation by exploring links between left-behind places, uneven regional development, and multi-level governance. In doing so, the network aims at understanding just eco-social transformation in different geographical contexts. This involves analysing the role of place-based social innovations and policies in addressing regional disparities. We aim to scrutinise how social innovations and eco-social policies can contribute to better managing newly emerging eco-social risks, and how political-institutional structures and policies that stabilise unsustainable patterns of modern social life can be changed to shape a just eco-social transformation.

ESPPRIT Objectives

3. Promote interdisciplinary discussions by bringing together scholars from Regional Studies, Urban and Regional Planning, Economic Geography, Regional Science, and Policy Studies. As studies on social innovation often operate in isolation from research on social policy and welfare states, bringing these disciplinary perspectives together can aid understanding barriers and levers of change for accelerating eco-social transformations that focus on social and spatial justice on different levels.

4. Showcase conceptual, methodological, and empirical work by identifying translation mechanisms between different scales and disciplines. We aim to bring together conceptual thinking with methodological considerations and empirical findings, across different policy domains (e.g., health, urban planning, mobility, or energy) and levels of governance (e.g., local, regional, national, supranational). The objective is to develop interdisciplinary learning to shape academic and policy work for just eco-social futures.

ESPPRIT Activities

Event 1: Thematic Workshop 1 | Network Kickoff | 28 May 2024 | online, Zoom

Theme of the event: Eco-Social Policy and Practice for Innovation and Transformation (ESPPRIT)

The workshop will focus on the status quo of Regional Studies in systematically addressing regional transformations, different disciplinary approaches to the systematic reorganisation of society and the strengths and limitations of strategies promoting sustainable wellbeing.

Activities:

- Introduction by the network's organisers
- Keynotes by Kevin Morgan and Tuuli Hirvilammi followed by Q&A
- Opportunities to engage: Contribute research interests and expectations in participating in the network

Event 2: Special Session at the RSA Winter Conference | November 2024 | London, UK

Theme of the event: Just regional eco-social transformations

The Session will engage with the overlooked adverse implications, consequences, and outcomes of regional transformations regarding justice and societal wellbeing, better understanding regional economic disparities, and alternative approaches to address the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of wellbeing.

Activities:

- Organised Special Session by the network's organisers
- Opportunities to engage: Paper presentations from established and early career researchers within and beyond the network
- Call for Contributions to be published in Summer 2024

Event 3: Thematic Workshop 2 | 18-19 June 2025 | Oxford, UK

Theme of the event: The geography of alternative economic development policy for eco-social transformations

The workshop will focus on the role of place and space in economic development policy, asking how we can rethink economic development policy to shape an eco-social transformation and how economic, environmental, and social sustainability can be balanced within alternative economic development approaches.

Activities:

- Keynotes, moderated panel and world café
- Catered lunch and event dinner and local field trip with networking
- Opportunities to engage: presentations of current research activities, session proposals for moderated discussion, informal networking, childcare services provided

Event 4: Thematic Workshop 3 | October 2025 | Vienna, AT

Theme of the event: Learning from social innovation and social policy for eco-social transformation

The workshop will discuss policy instruments and policy mixes that can shape an eco-social transformation while ensuring equity and justice. We will engage in debates about how existing institutions can be reformed or new ones created to enable sustainable and equitable transformations across multiple levels and scales.

Activities:

- Keynotes and plenary discussions with local initiatives, advocacy groups and researchers
- Catered lunch and dinner and local field trip with informal networking
- Opportunities to engage: research pitches, session proposals for moderated discussion, informal networking, childcare services provided

Event 5: Special Session at the RSA Annual Conference | June 2026 | location tbc

Theme of the event: Progressing theories and methodologies for transformative change

The Session will invite debates around progressive theories and methodologies to effectively inform the further development of Regional Studies, Economic Geography, and Urban and Regional Planning. It will focus on limitations, shortcomings and potentials in different approaches, showcasing empirical examples to illustrate the impact of progressive theoretical and methodological approaches on eco-social transformation.

Activities:

- Organised Special Session by the network's organisers
- Opportunities for engagement: Paper presentations from established and early career researchers within and beyond the network
- Call for Contributions to be published in spring 2026

Event 6: Thematic Workshop 4 | October 2026 | Amsterdam, NL

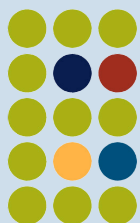
Theme of the event: Research, policy, and practice for regional futures: Shaping and designing an eco-social transformation

This workshop will engage with the question of how governance systems at multiple levels can effectively shape eco-social transformations and drive local and regional sustainability through social innovation. We will focus on multi-level governance structures, coordination efforts, institutional mechanisms and policy frameworks to bridge governance gaps and promote collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

Activities:

- Keynotes and roundtable discussion with research, policy, and practice
- Catered lunch and dinner with informal networking, and a local field trip
- Opportunities to engage: research pitches, session proposals for moderated discussion, informal networking, childcare services provided

For more information visit <https://www.regionalstudies.org/network/espprit/>



ESPPRIT

Eco-Social Policy and PPractice
for Innovation and Transformation

RSA Regional Studies
Association

Research Today, Policy Tomorrow

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