

Call for Papers
Special Issue proposal for ‘Regional Science Policy & Practice’

Pathbreaking trajectories: Socio-economic and Institutional de-peripheralization of marginal areas

Guest Editors:

Luca Storti – CPS Department, University of Torino (Italy)
luca.storti@unito.it

Giulia Urso – Social Sciences, Gran Sasso Science Institute, L’Aquila (Italy)
giulia.urso@gssi.it

Neil Reid – Department of Geography and Planning, University of Toledo (USA)
neil.reid@utoledo.edu

In recent decades, economic and political inequalities *between* different macro-areas of the world have increased. Moreover, spatial inequalities *within* macro-areas have also grown. In this scenario, the relations between economy-politics-society at the local level have become more kaleidoscopic and entropic than in the second half of 20th Century.

Against this background, new scholarly and policy attention has been devoted to peripheral, marginal, or ‘left-behind’ areas, i.e., those territories in which the economy is struggling, institutions are producing vicious lock-in type cycles, social elites are strengthening themselves through extractive and appropriative orientations towards public goods, and de-anthropization and depopulation are growing. At the same time, it becomes urgent to investigate further the reverse processes, i.e., under what circumstances peripheral areas can extract themselves – at least partly – from their marginality.

The time is, indeed, ripe to solicit a comprehensive and in-depth international examination of a counterintuitive and unexpected puzzle: *what are the economic, social and institutional mechanisms that make it possible for peripheral areas to regain centrality and vitality unexpectedly, even in a short time span?*

This special issue aims to collect contributions concerning these unexpected phenomena of *pathbreaking trajectories* that is the *economic and institutional de-peripheralization of marginal areas*. To this end, we intend to bring together scientific contributions from interconnected research fields – mainly related to geography, sociology, political science and public policy, political economy, and anthropology – shedding new light on the processes that the *de-peripheralization* of marginal areas rely upon. This reasoning is based on a general assumption according to which simple geographic features do not determine *per se* socio-spatial divisions and peripheralization. Peripheral areas are not natural; they emerge as a result of (not neutral) processes that imply hierarchical and power relationships. This has been emerging in a contradictory scenario. The world is increasingly global, but balkanized nonetheless; suffice it to say that new fractures between Northern and Southern Europe have

occurred, intersecting with those between East and West Europe; North America-Central America; Rural and urban China, etc.

In other words, peripheral spaces are produced; they can be the outcomes of more or less intentional construction processes pertaining to institutional and political assets, relational patterns and social norms, and the unequal allocation of economic resources. It therefore becomes essential to observe *how* and *if* multidimensional socio-economic changes may occur within peripheral areas deconstructing their marginality. In the literature, the attempt of demarginalization of peripheral areas have been often analyzed with respect to top-down initiatives; that is initiatives coming from political center(s) and directed towards peripheries (i.e., development aid programs, exogenous investments, national and international cooperation to support disadvantaged places, etc.). By contrast, this Special Issue intends to systematize and promote those studies that assume an internal point of view to peripheral areas, focusing on autonomous dynamics that are mainly endogenous to those contexts.

Strictly speaking, we invite papers including, but not limited to, contributions on the following aspects:

1. *Institutional changes making a given area or region less marginal.* These dynamics occur through the displacement of institutional assets or their more or less intentional adaptation/conversion to some shifts of the socio-economic environment. Therefore, we are soliciting papers that analyze the mechanisms leading to the formation in peripheral areas of political economy structures overcoming previous consolidated weaknesses so that the institutional assets become more robust.
2. *Collective actions and 'self-governance' processes at the local level.* Here we refer to papers investigating the determinants of the emergence in peripheral areas of “social molecules or groups” enhancing the governing of common and public goods that can help to enlarge social well-being and reduce economic dependencies. In this respect, investigations are relevant about different types of government and production of ‘common goods’ emerging from below that assert themselves as local resistance entities against hegemonic forms of power.
3. *Changes in the relational networks of elite groups.* It can be said that how elites are interconnected internally and tied to economic and political spheres vary in different contexts. In this respect, marginal areas are often characterized by: i) restricted and mutually disconnected elite circles, with a predatory orientation, thus subjugating the economic and political spheres; ii) elite networks that can penetrate politics and economics circles, so to establish mutual dependence and patronage patterns of resource exchanges. Hence, it is relevant to consider investigations reconstructing the dynamics through which relational patterns of the elites that are less hostile towards the general interest can be established. More precisely, we refer to papers investigating how and if elite networks marked by “embedded autonomy” – which favor a developmental orientation from the State, links between economy-politics-society in the light of mutual independence – occur.
4. *Economic renewal and innovation.* A way through which peripheral areas redeem themselves concerns the economic renewal of abandoned industrial sectors and spaces, the new emergence of craftsmanship sectors, and other types of economic innovations. Reorientations that result in lasting development processes are rare and

difficult to achieve. To understand success cases in the light of examples of failure, there needs to be empirical investigations on how the strategies of political economies support the formation of new relational patterns between the actors of innovation and the different institutions at the spatial level. Also, evidence is needed on where and how spontaneous dynamics of economic renewal or industrial reconversion or revitalization emerge. Hence, the demarginalization processes of peripheries re-orienting their development path is a way to observe the social and political/institutional re-embedding of economic activities.

We invite papers from a range of perspectives, different disciplines, and from around the world. Contributions combining empirical investigations well framed in clear conceptual frameworks are well-suited for the Special Issue. Comparative papers suggesting some policy orientations will be also highly appreciated.

Authors are invited to submit an abstract by the **15th of April 2022** to Luca Storti (luca.storti@unito.it), Giulia Urso (giulia.urso@gssi.it) and Neil Reid (neil.reid@utoledo.edu). Abstracts should be between 250 and 500 words in length. We will inform everyone on or around May 1, 2022, as to whether their abstract has been accepted for the special issue. Full papers are expected by 1st December 2022, and publication expected in fall 2023, following the peer review process.