Presenter: Touria Abdelkader-Benmesaud Conde

Affiliation: National University for Distance Education, Madrid, Spain

Co-Authors: Fernando Barreiro-Pereira

Geothermal Utilization of Springs in Atlantic Countries and India

Greenhouse gas emissions have doubled between 1971 and 2012, with CO2 accounting for 76 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. This research analyses the extent to which excess CO2 emissions are directly associated with energy consumption or are due to imperfections in the production processes of goods and services. A microeconomic specification of the energy market is developed and applied by means of econometric techniques for 9 Atlantic countries plus India, over the period 1995-2015. Although consumers generally cannot directly change the emissions caused by goods production processes, they can act on the emissions caused by their domestic energy consumption. Therefore, in this research, through a cost-benefit analysis, four inexpensive and sustainable energy systems for domestic consumption in eight countries are compared, resulting in the use of thermal water, where it can be applied, as the most socially efficient system.

Presenter: Farhan Ahmad

Affiliation: Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

Co-Authors: Roger Sweetman-Atlantic Technological University, Ireland; Amaya Vega-Atlantic Technological University, Ireland

Digital transformation for sustainable regional development: constructing a policy-based regional development matrix

Digital transformation is increasingly positioned as key to sustainable regional development. However, empirical evaluation is constrained by the lack of policy-based benchmarks derived from multi-level policy commitments, which would translate governmental priorities into an operational, regional reference framework. This paper develops a Regional Development Matrix (RDM) for Ireland's Northern and Western Region (NUTS-II) by bringing together digital transformation–related development priorities across economic, social, and environmental (triple bottom line or TBL) dimensions from policies at multiple governance and sectoral levels. Using directed qualitative content analysis following framework analysis procedures, we identify digital transformation/TBL priority statements, map digital "means" to regional TBL "ends", and assess operational commitment through targets, instruments, responsible actors, funding, and monitoring. The Matrix thus captures the policy-intended development pathway and makes cross-document priorities and implementation comparable across governance levels. The resulting matrix functions as a policy-based benchmark that after expert weighting can be used in firm level evaluation of digital transformation contributions to sustainable regional trajectories. The paper contributes to regional science and policy studies by 1) operationalising digital transformation-linked sustainable development priorities as a structured benchmark, and 2) offering a replicable method for deriving regional development matrices from multiple policies.

Presenter: Grant Allan

Affiliation: Department of Economics, University of Strathclyde

Co-Authors: Tomohiro Oda, Universities Space Research Association; David Waite, University of Glasgow.

Subnational emissions information and regional governance: Challenges from the data users' perspective

Subnational units (such as cities and regions) are introducing targets and policies for emissions reductions. Unlike at the national level, there is no consensus on the measurement of emissions at the subnational level, which interacts with the distribution of multi-level powers to create a complex policy architecture for effectively marshalling data. We review three approaches for measuring emissions at the sub-national level – respectively, activity-based, atmospheric-based and hybrid – and discuss the challenges for users of these data. We highlight the importance of considering data users in the development of emissions measures, and the importance of a social-science led dialogue, with data providers engaging in questions of local capacity and resources, their usability, timeliness, and inclusivity to support subnational policy actions.

Presenter: Amangeldi Kenjegaliev

Affiliation: University of Hull

The spatio-industrial ESG spillovers on elasticities in the United States

This study examines the spatio-industrial impact of ESG inputs on the elasticities of complementarity and substitution in the US. Antonelli Elasticity of Complementarity (AEC) and Allen-Uzawa Elasticity of Substitution (AES) elasticity measures are used to obtain q-complementarity and p-substitution elasticity for direct, indirect, and total effects. The results show that the ESG inputs in the AEC pairs are q-complements, most indirect input pairs are q-substitutes, and inputs within the indirect AES pairs are p-complements. The indirect and total elasticities did not exhibit discernible patterns. Moreover, such unpredictable patterns emanate from indirect elasticities and spill into total elasticities.

Presenter: Ernest Amrago

Affiliation: University College Cork

Co-Authors: Jason Loughrey, Teagasc; Geraldine Ryan, University College Cork; Frank Crowley, University College Cork; Justin Doran, University College Cork

Leveraging Interactive and Non-Interactive Knowledge Portfolios for the Transition to Sustainable Agriculture

The transition to sustainable agriculture depends critically on farmers' adoption of environmental innovations and the knowledge sources that inform these decisions. While existing studies typically examine individual knowledge sources in isolation, empirical evidence remains limited on how interactive and non-interactive knowledge combinations, their cumulative effects, and diminishing marginal influences shape farmers' innovation adoption decisions. This paper addresses this gap by using a recent cross-sectional data from Ireland to examine how interactive and non-interactive knowledge portfolios shapes farmers adoption of two environmental innovations: protected urea fertiliser, and multi-species sward. The results from the bivariate probit model suggest that interactive knowledge portfolio exert a significantly stronger positive influence on adoption than non-interactive portfolio for both innovations. We further identify a positive but non-linear relationship between the cumulative use of knowledge sources and adoption outcomes: additional knowledge engagement increases adoption probabilities at a declining rate. This declining effect is generally gradual in both beef cattle and dairy systems. Disaggregated results also show some similarities and heterogeneity across individual knowledge sources. Experiential knowledge, peer farmers, and farm advisors are influential across both innovations, while input suppliers and research publications are more relevant for protected urea fertiliser, and on-farm demonstrations and media for multi-species swards. By explicitly accounting for knowledge portfolios and their non-linear effects, this study advances understanding of knowledge-driven innovation adoption and offers targeted insights for the design of more effective agricultural knowledge transfer and sustainability policies.

Presenter: Franziska Bay

Affiliation: University of Groningen, Faculty of Spatial Sciences

Addressing Service Gaps in Rural Europe: The Role of Social Enterprises

With steady out-migration of young residents out of rural areas, many amenities, and with them a sense of community, disappear from villages and small towns. More often than not, this leaves vulnerable populations without access to crucial services or without support to reach (social) services in more distant locations. A possible solution to this development could be found in the social economy providing services where they are needed the most even if it might not be profitable to do for a private enterprise.

Using digital ethnography of actors in the social economy, this study explores the roles that social enterprises fulfill in European rural regions. Therefore, a typology of social economy actors was developed. The services provided by these social enterprises are evaluated against the needs of the residents and the gaps in (social) services and amenities identified via a prior survey. Finally, the potential for different social enterprises to replace lacking services in distinct rural areas is discussed.

Presenter: Alexander Blandon Lopez

Affiliation: Universidad del Tolima

Co-Authors: Janeth Gonzalez Rubio, Universidad del Tolima; John Alexander Blandon Castaño, UCL.

"Strategy, structure, and rivalry" as a key competitiveness dimension of the agroforestry system coffee and wood. The case of small and medium-sized producers of Ibagué, Colombia.

Faced with environmental and economic pressures, small coffee growers have turned to sustainable alternatives such as agroforestry systems. The sector has moved from monoculture to diversified models, responding to the demands of producers and the market. In this scenario, coffee retains its importance in the department of Tolima (Colombia), as it is the third largest national producer.

The area planted in Ibagué, the capital of Tolima, was 8,798 hectares in 2017, about 8,0% of the departmental total (SICA, 2017). The percentage of land planted with coffee with full sun exposure in Ibagué is 69%, with the rest under shade and semi-shade. This research seeks to elaborate on the main features of the "strategy, structure, and rivalry" as a key competitiveness dimension of the agroforestry system coffee and wood production of small and medium-sized specialty coffee producers in the municipality of Ibagué and to establish strategies for improvement. The aim is to identify opportunities and challenges for promoting its future development. Competitiveness is analyzed using Porter's diamond model (2016), supplemented with theories on agroforestry systems (Meybeck et al., 2021; Bertalanffy, 1993). The research applies a quantitative approach with a structured questionnaire administered to 37 producers and experts.

Based on the analysis of the key metrics of central tendency, dispersion, and shape for the four interrelated dimensions of the competitiveness diamond proposed by M. Porter, it is concluded that: first, the "Strategy, Structure, and Rivalry" component exhibits the highest average score, far exceeding the next component, "Factor Conditions." This differential suggests that, within the sector studied, the coffee-timber agroforestry system, internal competitive dynamics and organizational configuration constitute the main source of competitive advantage.

By and large, the study concludes that the future sustainability of the coffee-timber agroforestry system depends on strengthening organization, innovation, and services, prioritizing generational renewal and climate adaptation. Second, marketing is moving toward more direct channels, but there remains a marked inequality between coffee and forestry development. Finally, analysis of the strategic alternatives reveals a clear focus on differentiation based on quality and sustainability, backed by certifications and seals

recognized in the market. However, the implementation of these strategies faces significant barriers related to operational and administrative aspects, rather than financial ones.

Presenter: Sudhakar Brar

Affiliation: Spatial and Regional Economics Research Centre, Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

Co-Authors: Frank Crowley, Spatial and Regional Economics Research Centre, Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork; Justin Doran Spatial and Regional Economics Research Centre, Department of Economics, Cork University Busine

Moving Beyond a Binary View: The Inverted U-Shaped Relationship Between Perceived Intensity of External Pressure and Firm-Level Eco-Innovation

The Porter Hypothesis contends that well-designed environmental regulations can catalyse innovation, offsetting compliance costs. However, the mechanism linking external pressure to eco-innovation is not automatic. It is mediated by firms' subjective interpretation of their environment. Drawing on the Attention-Based View of the Firm and Threat-Rigidity Theory, we argue that firms respond not merely to the presence or source of external pressure, but to the perceived intensity of that pressure. Existing literature often overlooks this dimension and fails to capture how forcefully such pressures are experienced within firms. Using firm-level data from the Innovation in Irish Enterprises (IIE) survey (2022) administered by the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO), we make three primary contributions. First, we reconceptualise external pressure as a perceived intensity of external pressure, highlighting its role in mobilising managerial attention and resource allocation for eco-innovation. Second, we develop a novel theoretical framework that integrates the Porter Hypothesis, Attention-Based View, and Threat-Rigidity Theory to predict a non-linear relationship between perceived external pressure intensity and eco-innovation outcomes. We theorise an inverted U-shaped curve. Moderate perceived pressure stimulates eco-innovation by commanding managerial attention. Low or excessively high levels suppress eco-innovation due to inattention or cognitive overload and risk aversion. Third, we introduce orthogonal polynomial contrasts as a contribution in management research. This enables the detection of complex, non-linear effects and threshold dynamics in firms' strategic responses. Together, these contributions advance the eco-innovation literature by offering a more granular and dynamic account of how external pressures influence firm behaviour and eco-innovation.

Presenter: Graham Brownlow

Affiliation: Queen's Business School, Economics Department

Co-Authors: Leslie Budd, Department of Public Leadership and Social Enterprise (PuLSE) at the Open University Business School.

Northern Ireland and the Economic Consequences of Brexit Revisited: the "best of both worlds" or a lost decade?

Recent quantitative work has suggested that Brexit's macroeconomic damage is traceable to its effects on uncertainty, particularly as it reduces investment. Brexit has in addition, had particular place-based economic consequences in Northern Ireland (NI). This paper applies a variety of concepts to try and disentangle why NI has experienced these place-based effects. The application of Transaction Cost Economics (TCE) – as it relates to supply chains - for instance provides some useful insights regarding the "border in the Irish Sea". In the regional context, Brexit has compounded pre-existing institutional-economic weaknesses: uncertainty associated with the legacy of violence and underperformance in the operation of devolution have contributed to NI's inadequate investment, innovation and productivity. The place-based economic analysis suggests that policy approaches should focus on the fact NI shares UK-wide weaknesses; in addition, the region features that are magnified versions of UK problems as well as problems unique to it.

Presenter: Amanda Calderwood

Affiliation: Ulster University

Co-Authors: Kristel Miller, Ulster University; Karen Bonner, Ulster University

Grow Your Own: Team Development and Scaling in Peripheral Regions

The benefits of scaling are well documented in literature surrounding research, policy and practice. Organisations that successfully scale are evidenced to increase revenues, outpace competitors, expand customer bases and increase productivity. At a national level, scaling organisations have been proven to contribute disproportionately to economic growth through job creation, export expansion, innovation, and skills development. They play a critical role in regional economies, which collectively shape national competitiveness and resilience. Despite the importance of scaling to both regional and national prosperity, research on how organisations scale in resource-constrained regions remains limited. While existing studies focus largely on organisational processes, less attention has been given to a team perspective, particularly in peripheral regions where organisations face restricted talent pools, limited infrastructure, and weaker connectivity.

This study addresses that gap by examining how organisations in peripheral regions develop internal capabilities to support scaling. Specifically, it explores how constraints in peripheral regions influence managers to adopt a "grow-your-own" approach to human capital development. Rather than relying on external recruitment to fill skills gaps, organisations invest heavily in internal workforce development and strategically shape organisational culture to support growth.

The study adopts an exploratory, qualitative, longitudinal multiple case study design. Four for-profit organisations located in peripheral regions across the island of Ireland were selected: two technology organisations and two non-technology organisations, either currently in the process of scaling or who have successfully scaled. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with owner managers, senior managers, and representatives from business support agencies, triangulated with secondary data.

Findings reveal that recruitment represents one of the most significant challenges to scaling in peripheral regions. Limited access to experienced talent forces organisations to prioritise internal development over external hiring. Existing employees, who have firm-specific knowledge, become pivotal to growth and are often repositioned into new roles as the organisation expands. Rather than hiring solely for experience, these peripheral organisations prioritise attitude and cultural fit, recognising that technical skills can be developed internally.

A dominant theme across cases is the strategic shift to culture building; as organisations transition into scaling, managerial attention moves toward developing a strong, cohesive culture. Leaders recognise that culture plays a critical role in both retaining existing talent and attracting new employees in regions where external labour markets are thin. Significant investment is directed toward internal training, mentoring, and structured development pathways, reinforcing a long-term commitment to human capital accumulation.

This research contributes to the organisational scaling literature by highlighting context and team development in under-researched peripheral regions. It demonstrates how scaling organisations adapt to regional constraints through intentional team development and culture formation.

Presenter: Tony Champion

Affiliation: CURDS, Newcastle Univesity

Co-Authors: Ian Shuttleworth, QUB

Has the long-term reduction in migration rates continued since 2011? An analysis using the ONS Longitudinal Study (ONS-LS) of England & Wales

In the context of the literature's mixed findings on the latest trends in within-country migration rates from around the world, this paper builds on our previous work on the propensity to change address between the censuses of England and Wales 1971-2011 by revisiting those results and updating the picture to 2021. It uses the ONS-LS's ca-1% sample of linked census records to measure the proportion of LS members who at the end of each intercensal decade were living at a different address from that at its start and compares the results across the five decades from 1971-1981 to 2011-2021. The direct drivers of the aggregate changes observed are identified by reference to the distance of their intercensal address change and the range of personal characteristics provided by the censuses, including the type of area where they were living at the start of the decade. Regression analysis is then used to quantify the role of time using decade dummies and Blinder-Oaxaca modelling decomposes the changes between selected decades in terms of the relative importance of compositional and behavioural change. Finally, the findings are discussed within the context of longer-term societal changes and the impact of period events such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic

Presenter: Shula Chisha

Affiliation: Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

Co-Authors: Tracy Bradfield, Frank Crowley and Justin Doran, Dept. of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

Regional Resilience and Recovery Across Ireland: A Longitudinal Analysis of Adaptive Capacity

This paper examines regional economic resilience across Ireland over nearly four decades (1986-2022), analysing how Irish electoral divisions demonstrated differential capacity for resistance, recovery, and adaptive transformation across six major economic shocks. While most resilience research focuses on single shocks, typically the 2008 financial crisis, this study addresses critical gaps by examining sequential shocks including the pre-Celtic Tiger restructuring (1986-1993), the boom years (1994-2007), the financial crisis (2008-2012), recovery (2013-2019), COVID-19 (2020-2021), and post-pandemic adjustment (2022-2024).

The study will use electoral division-level data (approximately 3,400 spatial units), from eight censuses conducted during the period 1986 to 2022. The analysis provides unprecedented granularity for examining intra-regional heterogeneity. The study employs dynamic shift-share analysis to decompose employment changes into national trends, industrial composition effects, and regional competitive effects, combined with spatial regression to account for spillovers and inter-dependencies between regions.

The research investigates three key questions. First, how do structural economic characteristics, sectoral diversity, human capital, firm size distribution, and spatial factors explain variations in resilience capacity across Irish regions? Second, how do sequential shocks interact, and do prior shock experiences enhance or diminish resilience to subsequent disturbances? Third, what explains the persistent disparities between the Border, Midland, and Western regions versus the Southern and Eastern regions and Greater Dublin region?

The study contributes methodologically by applying longitudinal analysis to regional resilience research at a granular level and it provides policy-relevant insights into building adaptive regional economic capacity in small open economies characterized by strong spatial dependencies and FDI-led development models.

Presenter: John Paul Clifford

Affiliation: University College Cork

The environmental impact of transitioning land-use towards crops for food security and biofuels

The environmental impact of transitioning Irish land-use towards crops for food security and biofuels

This research seeks to identify the environmental impact of a change of agricultural land-use from livestock to crops. In particular, the main focus is on oilseed rape which can be used for cooking, animal feed, protein and in biodiesel. The recent domestic growth of the crop provides an opportunity for a broader mix of domestically developed products, increasing food security and potentially lowering transport emissions. Food Vision 2030 sets out the objective to increase the land under tillage in Ireland. This has regional impacts for how land will be used. This research seeks to identify the greenhouse gas emissions from livestock and crops and identify the environmental impact of increased land under tillage, as set out in Food Vision 2030. The purpose of this research is to identify this environmental impact using data from the Teagasc National Farm Survey and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. This research is part of a larger report on the feasibility of developing a larger domestic crop and processing sector in Ireland which could support of the growth of domestic industries while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Presenter: Femke Cnossen

Affiliation: University of Groningen

Co-Authors: Davide Lunardon

Job Attributes and Turnover: the role of local labour market tightness

We show how dissatisfaction with different job attributes relates to workers' job mobility. We distinguish between salary, tangible work arrangements and intangible attributes., using ten waves of the Dutch Working Conditions Survey (2014-2023) linked to administrative records covering over 400.000 workers. We find that dissatisfaction with intangible attributes (interesting work, learning opportunities and supervisors) is the strongest and most robust predictor of job separation, associated with a rise in the separation rate of three to five percentage points on a mean of 20.5%. Different sources of dissatisfaction are associated with different mobility behaviours: salary dissatisfaction predicts job-to-job transitions, dissatisfaction with interesting work predicts exits into unemployment, and dissatisfaction with supervisors predicts transitions from wage employment into self-employment. These responses are partly cyclical: the relationship between intangible dissatisfaction and turnover is stronger in tighter labour markets, which we measure on the occupation-local labour market level. Overall, we show that the type of job attributes a worker is dissatisfied with matters both for the likelihood of leaving and for the kind of labour market transition that follows.

Presenter: Frank Crowley

Affiliation: Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork.

Co-Authors: Josh O'Driscoll, Justin Doran, David Meredith and Mary O'Shaughnessy,

Population Shrinkage: Understanding the Role of Density and Spatial Proximity

In recent decades, Ireland's economy has transformed from experiencing low growth in the 1980s and early 1990s, to the Celtic Tiger boom, and then to the post-2008 crisis, while at the same time undergoing significant but unevenly distributed population growth. Against this backdrop, this paper examines whether core-periphery and agglomeration mechanisms help explain localised population shrinkage within a nationally expanding population system. Using logit models and seven censuses spanning 1986-2022, this study examines how population density and distance influence shrinkage across both generational and intercensal periods. The findings indicate that remoteness increases shrinkage risk, while higher population density generally enhances resilience in the long term. However, these relationships vary across macroeconomic phases, with density effects reversing during the high growth Celtic-Tiger period. These findings demonstrate that spatial structure remains central to understanding shrinkage even in contexts of aggregate national growth, highlighting the importance of fine-grained spatial analysis for identifying concealed patterns of decline and informing policy responses.

Presenter: Anne Devlin

Affiliation: Economic and Social Research Institute

Co-Authors: Seamus, McGuinness, ESRI; Adele, Whelan, ESRI

Wellbeing in the Irish Gaeltacht

The areas in Ireland where the Irish language remains the native tongue are known as the 'Gaeltacht'. These areas tend to be on the West coast, further from Dublin and are predominantly rural areas. They also tend to have ageing populations as young people move away for education and work. However, it is written in to law that these regions must be protected and revitalised. This work sets out to measure wellbeing in these areas in a holistic way which accounts for their unique context. We use Census data from 2016 and 2022 to do this and create a wellbeing index at a small geographic level for every area in Ireland. We then use this to compare how wellbeing in the Gaeltacht differs from non-Gaeltacht areas and also how it has changed over time in light of the COVID-19 and other macroeconomic shocks between the two census points.

We find that the drivers of well being are slightly less prevalent in Gaeltacht areas relative to non-Gaeltacht areas. We then find that our overall well-being composite measure is also lower in Gaeltacht areas relative to non-Gaeltacht areas. And that well-being has fell between 2016 and 2022 across the country although with the fall in well-being larger in Gaeltacht areas. Thus meaning greater inequality over time between Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas. This is concerning given the importance of promoting the Gaeltacht region in law. This work will therefore have significant policy implications for place-based policy in Ireland as well as in other countries where there are minority language communities e.g. Wales or the Basque region.

Presenter: José Andrés Estévez

Affiliation: Economic and Social Research Insititute (ESRI) and Trinity Collegue Dublin (TCD)

Co-Authors: Miguel Tovar, ESRI

Empowering Homes? Unravelling the Connection Between Energy Efficiency and Well-being

The success of modern energy policies hinges on the assumption that energy efficiency investments provide significant benefits across a wide range of policy objectives. We propose a theoretical model to study the relationship between energy efficiency, energy poverty and well-being. We leverage a novel unified micro-level dataset that combines Irish households' socioeconomic data with their dwellings' characteristics. Estimating a linear probability Two-Way Fixed Effects model, complemented by a Difference-in-Differences design that exploits exogenous weather shocks, we find that the relationship between energy efficiency and energy poverty is weak. We fail to find convincing evidence that improvements in energy performance ratings are associated with an increased capacity to afford adequate warmth, with only modest on low efficiency performance buildings. Additionally, findings show no differential impact of extreme weather on households living in high energy efficiency dwellings. Overall, our evidence suggests that low income and being a tenant are the strongest predictors of energy poverty. Energy efficiency investments are unlikely to deliver the large welfare and environmental benefits widely expected from them, raising questions about their role in achieving a just energy transition. While income supports can alleviate energy poverty in the short term, comprehensive policies for housing, income inequality and other structural issues must be addressed alongside long-term energy policies. Effective solutions lie in well-targeted policies that cautiously consider their general equilibrium effects.

Presenter: Rudy Fernandez-Escobedo

Affiliation: (1) J.E. Cairnes School of Business & Economics, University of Galway, Galway, Ireland (2) Cañada Blanch Centre for Contemporary Spanish Studies, London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), London, United Kingdom

From Clusters to Labour Returns: Digital Transformation and Regional Competitiveness

Industrial clusters have long been associated with superior regional economic performance, yet their ability to generate improved returns to labour increasingly depends on the capacity of regions to adopt and leverage digital technologies. This paper examines how industrial clustering, digital transformation, and regional competitiveness interact to shape labour returns across regions.

The study adopts a quantitative and exploratory approach based on a cross-sectional design. A cluster-mapping exercise is first conducted using establishment-level data to identify the spatial distribution and intensity of industrial clusters. The mapping reveals substantial territorial heterogeneity, indicating that agglomeration advantages are unevenly distributed across regions.

Building on this spatial evidence, the paper combines cluster indicators with regional measures of digital transformation, productivity, and innovation to explore their relationship with returns to labour. The empirical analysis uses regional data for Spain as an illustrative case. A multivariate modelling approach is employed to assess how digital adoption and competitiveness condition the association between clustering and labour outcomes. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns and mechanisms rather than establishing causal effects.

The findings suggest that industrial clusters are positively associated with regional returns to labour, but that these effects are significantly stronger in regions characterised by higher levels of digital transformation and competitiveness. In contrast, clustered regions lacking both sufficient technological capacity and competitive conditions appear less able to translate agglomeration advantages into improved labour outcomes.

The paper contributes to regional science by highlighting digital transformation as a key mechanism linking clusters to regional competitiveness and labour returns, with clear implications for place-based development strategies.

Presenter: Ugo Fratesi

Affiliation: Politecnico di Milano

Co-Authors: Hasan Engin, Duran, Izmir Institute of Technology

The role of economic trends, institutional changes and macroeconomic policies in agglomeration and disparities: A multi-scale analysis

The issue of the spatial concentration of economic activities has predominantly been addressed in recent literature through two principal lenses. The first concerns the efficiency or inefficiency of concentrated locations, particularly large cities, in generating income and growth.

The second focuses on the evolution of disparities between places, which in recent years have been characterised predominantly by divergence, due to agglomerations and large cities expanding and attracting activities to the detriment of weaker regions and towns.

The consequences of these processes have also been studied, and have been identified in growing discontent, especially in places that don't matter and regions in development traps, with disparities increasing their relevance as a political issue, for example, in the European Union.

The processes of agglomeration, however, need to be studied at different scales simultaneously in order to be properly understood, since distinct processes can characterise the concentration of economic activities at the regional scale within countries and at the urban scale within regions.

Furthermore, the processes of concentration and dispersion, as well as the increase and decrease of disparities, cannot be assumed to be uniform; rather, they are clearly affected by technological trends, institutional changes, and policy developments.

In this conceptual context, the present paper investigates the determinants of economic disparities in the long run, considering both the regional and sub-regional scales. To this end, a panel database is constructed for all EU countries, comprising data on disparities at the NUTS2 level and at the NUTS3 level within NUTS2 of each country, taking advantage of Theil decompositions.

Subsequently, the evolution of disparities inside countries, at both regional and urban scales, is examined through econometric analysis to determine the extent to which it is influenced by exogenous trends, institutional changes, and national policies, both with direct spatial objectives and of pure macroeconomic nature.

Preliminary results indicate that total inequality increases with GDP growth, trade openness, population, and government debt, and decreases with industrialisation and human capital; between-region inequality increases with GDP growth and government debt, and decreases with public sector intensity, industrialisation, and human capital;

within-region (urban scale) inequality increases with GDP growth, trade openness, population growth, and decreases with public sector intensity.

Other aspects that will be investigated include population ageing, inflation, monetary policies, and policies with specific spatial targets. Finally, the paper will further examine the impacts of different macroeconomic-regimes and of heterogeneity by type of country.

The findings of this paper will provide policy guidance to the extent that they demonstrate that disparities do not solely depend on regional aspects, but are also influenced by macroeconomic determinants and policies. Furthermore, understanding which macroeconomic policies favour rich regions or cities will assist in identifying when such macro interventions should be accompanied by measures to counterbalance their centripetal effects at the relevant (regional or urban) scale.

Presenter: Ammu George

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Co-Authors: Paul Cheung, National University of Singapore; Huanhuan Zheng, City University of Hong Kong

India’s FDI Border Restrictions and China FDI to Emerging Markets

Fearing opportunistic takeovers during the economic upheaval caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, India imposed FDI restrictions, suspending the automatic route for FDI from its border-sharing neighbours. Applying the difference-in-differences methodology to bilateral greenfield project investment data from the Orbis BVD database, this study finds robust evidence that the 2020 India FDI restrictions created a dent in China's greenfield investments in India, both on the intensive and extensive margins. Furthermore, the FDI restrictions adversely affected greenfield project investments in specific industries, including the manufacturing of metals, electrical equipment & motor vehicles, and professional & technical services. Lastly, the 2020 India FDI restrictions led to international spillovers, with China reallocating its outward greenfield FDI intended for India to other emerging markets in ASEAN and Latin America.

Presenter: Byron Graham

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Co-Authors: Karl Matikonis, Lochlann Quinn School of Business, University College Dublin

Beyond creative destruction: How firm size shapes the impact of technology investment on employment in skill-deprived economies

This paper focuses on the impact of technology investment on job growth and job quality in skill deprived economies. We draw on ideas from Schumpeterian creative destruction and skill biased technological change to argue that the impact of technological investment on job growth and quality manifests through distinct channels, moderated by firm size. Hypotheses are tested using fixed effects panel regression, drawing on firm level data from Northern Ireland. As a peripheral region with productivity and skill gaps, Northern Ireland is an ideal setting for the analysis. The results show that technology investment does not reduce employment growth, with small firms exhibiting modest growth. In contrast, large firms do not experience employment growth, but do exhibit improved employment conditions through higher wages and more stable contracts. This highlights that skill biased technological change depends on firm size, with smaller firms experiencing employment growth, and larger firms increasing job quality. From a policy perspective, technology investment should be combined with initiatives to enhance skills and management practices to drive positive outcomes.

Presenter: Desjana Grymshi

Affiliation: Humboldt University of Berlin & IAMO

Understanding the typologies of rural stayers: Evidence from rural Albania and Kosovo

Shifting from a variable-centered to a pattern-centered approach, this study expands the literature by focusing on how behavioral factors and perceived satisfaction shape typologies of stayers. Using data from 1,020 individuals we conducted a Latent Class Analysis using ten ordinal indicators capturing anticipated emotional costs of leaving, constraints to leave, staying out of convenience, and rural place attachment. Class membership was further modeled as a function of individual-level covariates, including gender, marital status, perceived life satisfaction in general and particularly satisfaction with staying in the village. Results support a three-class solution characterized by clear differences in terms of perceived life satisfaction and sociodemigraphic differences. Competing models with increasing numbers of classes were estimated using the poLCA package in R. The number of classes was determined through a three-step procedure: (1) estimation of competing models, (2) comparison of model fit considering AIC and BIC, (3) entropy and evaluation of model stability, class size, and interpretability. Three-class solution - satisfied, stuck and acquisent rural stayers - was retained.

Presenter: Junjian Gu

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Co-Authors: Leonard Leye Li, UNSW Sydney

The Societal Determinant of Corporate Labor Disclosure: Evidence from Employee's Maternal Health in Japan

This paper studies whether, and if so, how macro-level maternal health affects firm-level disclosure policies regarding female employees. Based on a novel setting in Japan, we find a positive association between poorer macro-level maternal health and firms' disclosure policies in terms of female-related job information, after controlling for various time-variant firm and macro attributes, as well as time-invariant firm fixed effects. Cross-sectional analyses indicate that this relation is more pronounced in firms with less social capital. These findings suggest that firms in regions less attractive to female labor forces increase female-related disclosures to enhance their social capital. Further analyses eliminate alternative explanations, suggesting that our empirical inference is not due to the information demand channel nor talent demand channel. We also find that increased firm-level disclosure of female-related information has positive effects on future firm-level recruitment efficiency, as well as macro-level maternal health.

Presenter: Tiarnán Heaney

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Finding the Right Time and Place: Place-based Agricultural Development, and the Congested Districts Board of Ireland 1891 - 1909

Can rural place-based policies that focus on agricultural development reduce poverty? I examine this question through a unique early economic development programme in Ireland's poorest regions: the Congested Districts Board. Established in 1891 in response to high poverty levels in the west of Ireland, the Board sought to raise employment and improve living standards primarily by modernising and reorganising agriculture, as well as developing local industries. The Board also sought to improve the commercial viability of farms by acquiring and breaking up large estates, redistributing higher-quality land, increasing the size of small holdings, and reclaiming unproductive land. By 1909, it had purchased more than 180 estates covering over 1,850 km2, resold 8,400 refurbished farms to former tenants, restructured a further 3,000 holdings, and redistributed 200km2 of higher-quality farmland.

To evaluate the effect of this intervention, I digitise and geo-code the investment records from the Annual Reports of the Congested Districts Board between 1891 and 1909, enabling an unprecedented analysis of these activities. I first assess whether the policy improved rural living standards, using data at the Poor Law Union level (n=158). Employing difference-in-differences framework with two-way fixed effects on a matched sample, I find strong evidence that the programme significantly reduced poverty: on average, each £1 spent lifted three people out of absolute poverty. I then investigate whether the Board's emphasis on agricultural development drove these gains. Drawing on newly digitised crop and livestock output data, I show that the policy accelerated a transition from low-value tillage to higher-value livestock production. Specifically, output of oats, flax, and hay declined, while cattle, swine, and poultry production increased.

To corroborate these findings, I assemble new District Electoral Division-level data (n=3,439) on farmstead and out-office buildings per household, as a proxy for agricultural capital and livestock intensity. Exploiting distance to the policy boundary, a fuzzy geographical regression discontinuity design reveals that treated districts experienced a 26% increase in such buildings, confirming a substantial increase in agricultural capital in predominantly poor, treated areas. Moreover, by exploring the policy's effect on population and migration trends, I rule out the possibility that these agricultural improvements were driven by wealthier farmers resettling in treated areas to access agricultural schemes.

Although the prevailing economic view is that place-based development policies often fail, rigorous micro-econometric evidence on their causal effects remains scarce - particularly for interventions targeting agricultural modernisation, rather than encouraging shifts into manufacturing or services. This study provides rare historical evidence that rural place-based policies can significantly reduce poverty and improve living standards when they align with a locality's comparative advantage.

Presenter: Kyron Hoare

Affiliation: University of Galway

Developing tech clusters in digitally intensive and digitally lagging regions: exploring the roles of change agents

This paper explores how organisations act as change agents to establish, develop and grow digital and tech clusters in different regional contexts, comparing these dynamics between regions with existing digitally intensive knowledge bases versus more digitally lagging regions.

The challenges and opportunities of digitalisation and high-tech growth vary considerably across regions, with clear digital divides illustrated by an intense spatial concentration of innovation in advanced technologies such as AI. Regions best equipped to develop high-tech industries are those with existing related digital capabilities (Apostol and Hernández-Rodríguez 2024, Xiao and Boschma 2023). This pattern persists despite the prospect of improved telecommunication and widespread online connectivity facilitating knowledge spillover regardless of physical proximity.

The agency perspective in economic geography explores solutions for these spatial inequalities through change agents in the form of local actors who engage in regional change processes (Grillitsch and Sotarauta 2020). To successfully create new high-tech development paths and thus close the digital divide, the roles and strategies of change agents depend on their regional pre-conditions and must be adapted according to local context. To understand how this regional context influences change agency for tech cluster development, this research develops a novel typology of local authority districts based on their level of occupational digital skills, classifying regions as Digitally Intensive, Digitally Ready and Digitally Lagging.

This digital-industrial typology is mapped across Ireland and the UK, with case studies of tech clusters in each type of region used to explore and compare the roles of change agents. Through interviews with cluster organisations, innovation hubs, local authorities and tech start-ups, these cases explain how tech clusters might sustainably develop across different regional contexts.

The aim of this ongoing research is to inform place-based policy approaches to the digital transition and high-tech regional growth, where the digital divide can be closed through the agentic strategies of local actors.

Presenter: Carolin Ioramashvili

Affiliation: University of Sussex

Ticket to impact: estimating the impact of public transport infrastructure for research productivity

It is well established that the germination, development and sharing of new ideas benefits from face-to-face interaction. New, particularly complex and contextual knowledge is described as tacit, or non-codifiable (Polanyi, 1966). This idea underpins theories of why dense cities are more innovative (Storper & Venables, 2004). Empirically, it has been shown that knowledge is surprisingly geographically sticky (Storper & Sonn, 2008; Van der Wouden & Youn, 2023) and that breakthrough ideas are more likely to emerge from urban areas (Berkes & Gaetani). Furthermore, face-to-face interaction including through conferences (Chai & Freeman, 2019), non-stop flights (Bahar et al., 2023) and high-speed rail (Kang et al., 2023) increases the likelihood of collaboration. In this, vein, the research question for this project asks: What is the impact of transport connectivity on research productivity in collaborative research projects?

To identify the impact of rail connectivity on outcomes of collaborative research projects, this project, funded by the Innovation and Research Caucus, will rely on the unexpected nature of delays. A simple model could regress project impact on a measure of rail connectivity between collaborators. However, selection effects are likely at play, in that well-connected organisations are more likely to collaborate. Therefore, we will derive a treatment variable based on a sudden deterioration in connectivity after the start of a project. Given that delays are often related to engineering problems or natural forces, these would not be anticipated by project partners before the start of a project. Collaborative projects where the connection between partners was affected by a sudden service deterioration are considered as the treatment group, whereas projects with no change in rail connectivity are used as the control group.

We will rely on the publication and patent data on the GtR+ dataset to measure project outcomes and impacts. Beyond sheer counts of outputs, we will consider both indicators of quality, e.g. number of citations, but also more granular measures of collaboration. For example, collaborative projects could become atomised if interaction is hindered. We will develop indicators of the intensity of collaboration, looking at whether participants from different organisations are listed among the first authors of a paper, rather than first authors representing one organisation only with collaborator organisations having made a less significant contribution to a publication.

With this basic set up, we can investigate heterogeneity by funder, programme type or subject and technology, making use of the enriched GtR+ data. Face-to-face interaction

may be more important in certain kinds of projects. Furthermore, we will investigate heterogeneity by organisation type. For example, collaborations between universities and businesses might require more interaction to bridge cultural and institutional distances (Boschma, 2005). Given the availability of a long time series since 2013, we can also test whether there were any behaviour changes following the Covid-19 pandemic and a greater shift to working from home and virtual means of interacting.

Presenter: Calvin Jones

Affiliation: Cork University Business School / Jones the Numbers Cyf

Assessing the regional economic impact of major events in the era of dynamic pricing

The attraction of major sporting and cultural events has long been part-and-parcel of regional economic development, albeit on shaky evidence. Visitation and spending - especially of non-regional residents - has been translated into estimates of additional regional output, gross value added and employment within (in the best case bespoke) regional input-output, Computable General Equilibrium or similar models. The age of dynamic pricing, driven by ever-more sophisticated algorithms over a widening range of services has however broken the link between event expenditures and regional economic impact, with significant and increasing proportions of spend comprising pure surpluses for non-regional suppliers and intermediaries. We use a case study of the Principality Stadium in Cardiff to assess the extent to which such developments might reduce the 'destination share' of event expenditures, and consider some implications for economic impact methodologies.

Presenter: Declan Jordan

Affiliation: University College Cork

Co-Authors: John Paul Clifford, University College Cork

Localising the Immigration Debate: Labour Market Evidence from Ireland

This paper examines immigration and local labour market dynamics in Ireland in the context of intensifying political and policy debates about immigration across advanced economies. In recent years, immigration has become a central issue in public debate in the European Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, where concerns about economic effects, pressures on local communities, and the distribution of migration's costs and benefits have featured prominently in political discourse. These debates have coincided with the rise of populist movements that frequently frame immigration as a source of economic and social strain, particularly at the local level.

Against this backdrop, this paper investigates some local dimensions of immigration in Ireland. Ireland provides a particularly relevant case study due to its rapid transition from a high-emigration to a high-immigration country since the early 2000s, alongside a relatively flexible labour market and significant regional variation in migrant settlement. While national-level analyses often dominate discussions of immigration's economic impacts, many of the perceived effects of immigration are experienced locally, where migrant populations settle and interact with local labour markets.

The analysis uses Irish Census data for 2011, 2016, and 2022 and focuses on urban settlements with populations of more than 1,000 people. Using these data, the paper examines how changes in immigrant population shares relate to patterns of employment and unemployment across places.

By taking a spatial and local-level perspective, the paper highlights differences in the scale and composition of immigration across urban settlements and explores how these patterns intersect with local labour market structures and sectoral employment profiles. In doing so, it contributes to broader debates about the economic implications of immigration by examining how local labour market effects mayvary within a national context.

Overall, the paper provides a locally grounded analysis of one effect of immigration in Ireland, offering insights relevant to ongoing policy debates about the economic role of immigration and the importance of understanding its impacts at the level where they are most directly experienced—local communities and labour markets.

Presenter: Tasos Kitsos

Affiliation: Aston University

Co-Authors: Francisco, Nobre, Kingston University; Emmanouil, Tranos, University of Bristol; Chiara, Donegani, Aston University

Nightmare neighbours: The economic geography of gambling shops and gambling harms

We examine how the concentration of gambling shops – a disamenity associated with urban structure and agglomeration externalities – can lead to harmful gambling behaviours at the individual level. Gambling has seen unprecedented increases in recent years, reaching £15.1 billion in 2023 in the UK, up 6.8% compared to the previous year.

Harmful gambling is also an increasingly recognised public health issue. 3.8% of England's population gambles at an "elevated risk" of addiction; 250,000 people in England have an addiction to gambling and these are linked with up to 500 suicides every year and up to £2 billion cost to the society.

On similar health concerns such as obesity and alcohol consumption, there is evidence that geographic proximity to relevant outlets (i.e. fast food or alcohol selling points) is a contributing factor. For gambling, such evidence is scant and often inconclusive whilst even less consideration has been given spatial structure characteristics such as density of exposure.

We propose a framework where proximity to dense environments of gambling opportunities could lead to increases in the likelyhood of gambling, and even more alarmingly, in the likelyhood to become a problematic gambler. We utilise Point-of-Interest geocoded data on the location of gambling shops and match these to the GambleAware Treatment and Support Survey Data. Doing this allows us to shed light into the relationship between the presence of gambling venues and gambling harms in England.

We use probit model that explore the relationship between gambling shops and gambling harms and address endogeneity concerns with a quasi-experimental design using Coarsened Exact Matching. Findings show that proximity to dense gambling environments is positively associated to the probability of being a gambler and a problematic gambler. These results highlight the risks of increasing gambling opportunities in space and call for attention on the regulatory framework for gambling venues through planning interventions.

Presenter: Luise Koeppen

Affiliation: The James Hutton Institute

Spatial Reconfigurations of Transition: Rural Inequalities and Emerging Political Implications in Scotland

Across advanced economies, large-scale transitions linked to decarbonisation, digitalisation, and restructuring of land and resource systems are reshaping regional development trajectories. While much attention has focused on urban innovation hubs and post-industrial cities, less is known about how these transformations unfold spatially across rural territories – and how they intersect with existing socio-economic inequalities.

This paper examines the spatial reconfiguration of transition processes in Scotland and asks a simple but underexplored question: what is changing, and where? Over the past decade, transition-related activities have expanded beyond metropolitan centres into remote and peripheral regions. Rather than approaching these developments through a singular narrative of environmental reform or rural revival, the paper foregrounds their territorial distribution and situates them within historically uneven socio-economic landscapes.

The central argument is that transitions do not unfold on neutral ground. They expand into areas shaped by long-term demographic ageing, service withdrawal, fragile labour markets, concentrated landownership, and high living costs. As a result, contemporary transformation increasingly overlaps with structurally vulnerable rural contexts. This spatial layering complicates simplified accounts of urban dynamism versus rural decline and instead points to differentiated geographies of adjustment.

By foregrounding the territorial expansion of transition processes, the paper contributes to debates on territorial inequality and the geography of discontent. Where new forms of restructuring coincide with socio-economic decline, there may be implications for political attitudes, perceptions of fairness, and trust in institutions. While the paper does not directly model political behaviour, it identifies the spatial conditions under which transitions may intersect with existing grievances or perceptions of marginalisation.

Conceptually, the paper advances a place-sensitive perspective on structural change. It shifts attention from aggregate national narratives toward place-specific interaction effects, emphasising that the socio-political implications of transition depend on pre-existing territorial structures. Understanding these spatial reconfigurations is crucial for anticipating longer-term political and social consequences and for designing policies that are sensitive to uneven development rather than blind to it.

Presenter: Luise Koeppen

Affiliation: The James Hutton Institute

Unequal Exposure and Futures: Place, Educational Opportunity and Life Trajectories in Scotland

Spatial inequalities remain a persistent feature of Scotland's socio-economic landscape, shaping patterns of opportunity, mobility, and life chances across places. While policy debates have increasingly focused on addressing poverty and deprivation, less attention has been given to how the spatial distribution of deprivation interacts with educational environments and life trajectories over time. Understanding how place shapes opportunity is particularly important in contexts where long-standing territorial inequalities intersect with changing economic and institutional landscapes.

This paper examines how neighborhood deprivation, measured through the Townsend Deprivation Score, relates to spatial inequalities in educational environments across Scotland. Building on earlier work examining the geographies of quality of life and territorial inequality, the study moves beyond static descriptions of deprivation by conceptualizing place exposure as a cumulative condition that shapes educational opportunities and life trajectories.

Using spatial analysis of Scottish neighborhoods and school environments, the paper maps the territorial distribution of deprivation and explores how educational outcomes and opportunities are embedded within broader socio-economic landscapes. Preliminary mapping highlights pronounced spatial clustering of disadvantage across both urban and rural contexts, suggesting that educational environments are frequently embedded within structurally unequal territorial settings.

The central argument is that educational opportunity is not evenly distributed across space but is structured by the cumulative exposure of individuals to place-based disadvantage. Rather than treating neighborhood deprivation as a background condition, the paper foregrounds how spatial inequalities interact with institutional environments such as schools, potentially reinforcing or mitigating territorial disadvantage.

By integrating spatial deprivation measures with educational data, the study contributes to debates on poverty, territorial inequality, and life chances in Scotland. It offers a place-sensitive perspective on educational inequality and highlights the importance of spatial context for understanding how opportunities and trajectories unfold across the life course. In doing so, the paper speaks to wider policy discussions about how interventions aimed at reducing deprivation and improving educational outcomes can better account for the territorial dynamics of inequality.

Presenter: Davide Luca

Affiliation: University of Cambridge, LSE III

Co-Authors: Zhiwu Wei; Neil Lee; Andres Rodríguez-Pose

Local wealth inequality linked to political protests across the Global South

The political consequences of inequality have become a matter of mounting concern. Relative deprivation theory posits that frustration arising from comparisons with proximate reference groups can fuel protests. Yet research has concentrated overwhelmingly on the Global North, notwithstanding the acute wealth disparities experienced by the majority of the world's population in the Global South. To address this gap, we assemble novel, fine-grained estimates of relative wealth at the 2.4 km × 2.4 km grid level to derive measures of local wealth inequality, which we link to over 645,000 georeferenced protest events recorded from 2014 to 2018. Exploiting variation within subnational regions, we document a robust, positive association between local wealth inequality and protest incidence. We show that the inequality–protest relationship is anchored in individuals' immediate surroundings. As the spatial radius defining 'local' expands, the association weakens, highlighting the primacy of experienced inequality. We also find that the inequality-protest link is mediated by national characteristics. The study advances the social sciences by furnishing novel empirical evidence on the micro-geographic underpinnings of political instability, demonstrating that inequality's political effects hinge on proximity, local class structure and national institutional environment.

Presenter: Davide Luca

Affiliation: University of Cambridge, LSE III

Co-Authors: Floris Block

The global geography of climate attitudes, North and South

Climate change is both materially and politically uneven, with impacts and perceptions shaped by geography. While subnational spatial divides in climate attitudes are well documented in high-income democracies, much less is known about whether these patterns hold in the Global South, where policy choices will be critical for both national development and global mitigation efforts. We combine a systematic review of the spatial drivers of climate opinion with an analysis of a new dataset covering around 40,000 individuals in 20 countries. We test whether urban–rural divides, distance to core cities and local economic structures influence climate perceptions. Our findings reveal both shared and divergent geographies of climate opinion between the Global North and South, highlighting why policy approaches developed in industrialised democracies cannot be assumed to translate seamlessly elsewhere.

Presenter: Ana-Maria Marcu

Affiliation: Bucharest University of Economic Studies

From airports to highways or vice versa? Interdependencies in EU transport infrastructure

The interdependencies between air transport infrastructure and terrestrial mobility networks represent a relevant issue for the European regional development research agenda, generating methodological and theoretical debates regarding the direction of causality of this relationship: do airports constitute catalysts for economic growth and the expansion of related infrastructure, or do they emerge as a response in regions already equipped with well-developed terrestrial networks? This article addresses this topic by analyzing the NUTS 2 regions of the European Union, aiming to highlight how the presence, scale, or performance of airport infrastructure influences or is influenced by the degree of development of road, rail, and intermodal systems.

This paper adopts an econometric perspective based on Granger causality testing, cluster analysis, Moran's I index for testing spatial autocorrelation, while also including the panel vector autoregressive (VAR) model, a methodology that allows for the examination of dynamic relationships and lag effects between explanatory variables (passenger traffic, air freight volume, regional GDP) and specific terrestrial infrastructure indicators, namely highway network density, railway network density, and the presence of intermodal nodes in proximity to airports.

The results of the analysis can represent solid foundations in the process of formulating public transport policies, as well as restructuring investments allocated to this field, identifying best practices from regions with superior performance. Thus, the study can support the decision-making process at European and national institutional levels, contributing to reducing disparities between regions and, implicitly, to increasing the degree of cohesion at the EU level.

Presenter: Martin McCracken

Affiliation: Ulster University

Co-Authors: Rachael Singleton, Ulster University

Barriers and Facilitators to Age Inclusive Workplaces: A COM-B Informed Thematic Analysis of Employer Perspectives

With decreasing birth rates, increasing life expectancy and later retirement ages, people over age 50 are representing a growing proportion of the workforce. However, in NI people aged 50-64 comprise the largest proportion of the economically inactive in NI (BIC, 2024). Despite the wealth of experience they can provide, people over 50 are leaving the workforce prematurely and barriers to re-entering employment continue due to persistent biases, outdated perceptions and limited workplace support for changing needs (Centre For Aging Better, 2023). While age is a protected characteristic under anti-discrimination laws in NI, Age inclusion in the workplace remains an underdeveloped policy area that requires further exploration (CMI, 2022).

Through a longitudinal, qualitative approach, this research explored the impact of a series of awareness and educational workshops designed to inform employers about the value of older workers, challenge age-related biases, and highlight the business benefits of age-diverse teams. Ultimately the workshops sought to illustrate to employers how improving recruitment and retention practices for people over 50 could help them to build more diverse and effective organisations.

A key element of the study was the semi-structured interviews which were conducted with 13 human resources professionals across multiple sectors post their attendance at the workshop. The HR professionals were typically responsible for managing equality, diversity, and inclusion issues in their organisations. In the interviews we explored employer perspectives on factors that hinder or facilitate age-inclusive practices using a behavioural science model that considers Capability, Opportunity, and Motivation (known as the COM-B model, Michie et al., 2011). The data which emerged from these interviews was analysed abductively using thematic content analysis and the COM-B framework to identify psychological, social, and structural barriers and facilitators of age-inclusive behaviours.

Findings revealed several key behavioural themes emerging. Most importantly the interviewees related how there were still psychological barriers such as stereotypes regarding over 50s technological ability and assumptions about health in evidence in organisations. Additionally, practical constraints including limited resources to prioritise age alongside other employee characteristics, appeared to impede the implementation of age-inclusive practices. Facilitators included supportive leadership, careful attention

to inclusive language, and organisational policies that promote flexible work arrangements and intergenerational collaboration. These findings highlight the need for interventions to foster genuinely age-inclusive workplaces and provide actionable recommendations for training, policy development, organisational strategy, and future research. Using the key findings from this research, the ultimate aim of this study is to design and deliver a bench marking tool which can influence behaviour change amongst employers to successfully hire and retain people aged 50 and over.

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Presenter: Ilze Mertena

Affiliation: Institute of Place Management, Manchester Metropolitan University

From In-Store Experiences to High-Street Ecosystems: Place-Embedded Experience Design in Micro and Small Businesses

Small and micro independent businesses account for over 80% of UK employer firms and support approximately 4.2 million jobs (Belt, 2025). They are central to high-street vitality, identity and sustainability, yet policy frameworks often prioritise scale and productivity, overlooking the collective contribution of micro and small enterprises (MSEs). While experience design literature has focused primarily on firm-level practices and organisational capabilities, less attention has been paid to how experience design operates in resource-constrained MSEs embedded in local places. Drawing on an experience economy lens, the study is based on 28 ethnographic interviews conducted in situ across six UK locations, supported by observation, photographs and informal conversations with local place managers.

Findings show that experience design in MSEs is predominantly passion-led and emergent, rooted in craft, creativity and personal values rather than formal management tools. While businesses create rich and meaningful experiences, these are often weakly embedded in pricing, digital strategy or long-term business models. However, cross-site comparison reveals a critical insight: effective experience design is not only in-store and owner-driven but also place-embedded and network-enabled. Owners actively mobilise local assets, collaborations, events and inter-business relationships to co-create customer experiences. Where place leadership and networks are visible, experiential value is amplified; where absent, businesses operate in isolation. This study argues that MSEs are better understood not as isolated experience designers but as actors within place-based high-street ecosystems. Such a perspective implies that local competitiveness and innovation depend not only on firm capabilities but on the relational and spatial infrastructures that shape experience creation.

Presenter: Lisa Messina

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Co-Authors: Barry, Quinn, Ulster University; Grace, Carson, Queen's University Belfast; Kristel, Miller, Ulster University

Sense-Making in the Polycrisis: The Role of Resilience and Social Capital in Navigating the Storm

Introduction

Recent years have seen the intensification of a polycrisis—a condition in which multiple, interwoven economic, political, and health shocks unfold through complex, non-linear, and transboundary dynamics, generating deep and sustained uncertainty (Janzwood and Homer-Dixon, 2022; Fletcher et al., 2026). Unlike discrete crisis events, polycrisis represents an enduring systemic condition in which uncertainty is embedded in everyday organisational decision-making (Henig and Knight, 2023). While prior research has examined SME responses to single crises, less is known about how resource-constrained firms navigate overlapping, interacting shocks where conventional planning frameworks often prove inadequate.

This paper investigates how Northern Irish (NI) agri-food SMEs made sense of polycrisis conditions arising from Brexit, the Covid-19 pandemic, and supply chain disruptions. These firms occupy a distinctive position: geographically embedded within the UK, yet economically integrated with both British and EU markets, resulting in exposure to regulatory, trade, and market volatility. Drawing on organisational sense-making theory (Weick, 1995; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014), crisis is conceptualised as an ongoing interpretive challenge, wherein leaders continuously construct meaning from ambiguous cues, build shared understanding among stakeholders, and enact strategic responses in the absence of stable information or guidance.

Methodology and Preliminary Findings

The study utilises qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 21 NI-based agri-food SMEs and 9 government or market support agencies. Findings indicate that SMEs relied heavily on business networks, peer learning, and institutional relationships to interpret uncertainty, compensate for information gaps, and coordinate adaptive responses. Networks served as critical sense-making arenas, enabling firms to collectively reframe emerging threats, exchange knowledge, and develop shared narratives of risk, opportunity, and survival. Owner-manager cognition, emotional resilience, and prior crisis experience also shaped interpretive processes, supporting agility, adaptability, and pragmatic problem-solving (Doern, 2016; Maalouf et al., 2025).

Rather than relying on formal strategic planning, most SMEs adopted iterative, improvisational, and action-oriented approaches, reflecting both resource constraints and the evolving polycrisis context. Through continuous cycles of interpretation and enactment, firms accelerated innovation, digitalisation, and supply chain reconfiguration, developing online sales channels, collaborative value-added offerings, and new operational practices. Sense-making processes enabled firms to identify and exploit unanticipated opportunities arising from disruption, such as the localisation of retail sourcing post-Brexit and increased consumer demand during Covid-19 lockdowns. These responses illustrate how SMEs "bounce forward" by embedding new capabilities and transforming operations rather than merely returning to pre-crisis states (Conz and Magnani, 2020; Hoque et al., forthcoming).

Conclusion

This study contributes to polycrisis and SME resilience scholarship by foregrounding sense-making as a core micro-process enabling adaptation under sustained uncertainty. It demonstrates how interpretive processes, emotional resilience, and socially embedded networks collectively shape adaptive capacity when crisis becomes persistent rather than episodic. Empirically, it offers insights into how SMEs in politically and economically complex regions navigate compounded disruptions. Practically, it highlights the importance of supporting network infrastructures, institutional guidance, and interpretive capabilities to enhance SME resilience in an era increasingly defined by polycrisis.

Presenter: Kristel Miller

Affiliation: Ulster University

Co-Authors: Matthew Cavanagh; Dami Osekita

From Project Trust to Place-Embedded Trust: Institutionalising Collaboration in Regional Innovation Partnerships

Regions are increasingly expected to address complex and interdependent challenges such as labour market inequalities, skills coordination and inclusive growth. These challenges exceed the authority of any single organisation and have led to the expansion of place-based partnerships involving public agencies, universities, firms and civic actors. While research on regional innovation systems and collaborative governance highlights the importance of trust in enabling coordination, existing work often treats trust as a precondition for collaboration rather than as a dynamic process that evolves over time. In particular, limited attention has been paid to how trust moves beyond interpersonal, project-based forms associated with early mobilisation to become institutionalised and stabilised within a place. This paper addresses the following research question: how does trust become embedded and sustained within regional partnerships addressing systemic challenges? In doing so, it develops a conceptual process model explaining how trust evolves from project-based to place-embedded forms.

The paper integrates insights from swift trust theory, collaborative governance and regional innovation systems research. The conceptual development is informed by sustained engagement in place-based innovation partnerships through an action-oriented and reflexive research approach, drawing on embedded participation, collaborative workshops and reflective analysis. This approach enables theory building grounded in the lived dynamics of cross-sector regional collaboration while remaining conceptual in orientation.

The paper distinguishes between project-based trust, which is often swift and interpersonal, and place-embedded trust, which becomes institutionalised within governance arrangements, shared infrastructures, routines and norms that structure interaction across organisations. Project-based trust enables rapid mobilisation but remains fragile. Place-embedded trust, by contrast, stabilises collaboration by reducing reliance on individual relationships and embedding coordination within the institutional fabric of a region.

The conceptual model proposes that regional collaboration evolves through phases. Initial mobilisation is enabled by shared purpose and swift trust. As collaboration deepens, interdependence and risk generate pressures that cannot be managed through

interpersonal trust alone. Institutionalisation occurs when collaboration becomes embedded in governance mechanisms, shared data and digital infrastructures, and routinised interaction practices. Over time, these mechanisms produce place-embedded trust that enables coordination to persist beyond project cycles or leadership changes.

The paper contributes to regional studies by extending trust theory from temporary teams to place-based innovation ecosystems and by conceptualising trust institutionalisation as a central process in sustaining regional collaboration. It highlights the importance of convening and boundary-spanning roles in supporting this transition. Universities and other neutral actors often play a critical role in early mobilisation, while sustained coordination depends on the emergence of system-level convening functions that embed trust across organisations and structures rather than within individuals alone.

Presenter: Kristel Miller

Affiliation: Ulster University

Policy Fragmentation and Spatial Inequality: Coordination Challenges in Regional Labour Market Systems

Persistent spatial inequalities in labour market participation and access to opportunity remain a defining challenge across many regions. These inequalities are commonly explained through differences in productivity, industrial structure or skills supply. However, less attention has been paid to how fragmented governance across policy domains may contribute to uneven labour market outcomes. In many regional systems, responsibility for employment, skills, health and economic development is distributed across multiple departments, agencies and delivery organisations. This fragmentation can produce misalignment, uneven service provision and gaps in support that reinforce spatial inequality. This paper addresses the following research question: how does policy and governance fragmentation contribute to persistent spatial inequalities in regional labour market systems?

The paper develops a conceptual account of fragmentation within regional labour market governance, drawing on insights from regional inequality research, collaborative governance and institutional coordination literatures. While existing work has emphasised economic drivers of spatial inequality, less attention has been given to how fragmented policy architectures shape coordination capacity and access to support across places. The paper argues that spatial inequality is not only an economic phenomenon but also an institutional one, produced through misalignment across policy domains, uneven local coordination capacity and fragmented data infrastructures.

The analysis is informed by an ongoing place-based research and innovation programme focused on labour market coordination and inclusion. Using an engaged and reflexive research approach, the paper draws on policy mapping, stakeholder engagement and collaborative workshops to develop a conceptual model of how fragmentation operates across regional labour market systems. Rather than presenting mature empirical findings, the paper uses this embedded perspective to identify mechanisms through which fragmentation may reinforce spatial inequality, including misalignment across policy domains, uneven access to information and services, and the absence of shared data infrastructures that support coordinated decision-making.

The paper contributes to regional studies by bringing institutional fragmentation into debates on spatial inequality and labour market performance. It highlights the importance of coordination capacity and shared infrastructures in shaping regional outcomes and suggests that addressing inequality requires attention not only to

programmes and funding but also to governance alignment and system-level coordination. Universities and other neutral actors can play an important role as conveners and knowledge brokers in supporting coordination across fragmented regional systems.

Presenter: Vassilis Monastiriotis

Affiliation: LSE

Co-Authors: Gabriel Pierzynski

Space blind industrial policy: the spatial footprint of state aid subsidies in Greece

Does industrial policy have a spatially regressive footprint? Does it work towards aggravating or, rather, towards tampering spatial disparities? We investigate these questions by examining the spatial footprint of state aid subsidies in Greece over the period 2016-2025 and contrasting it to the Cohesion Policy allocations in the country. Using project-level information on subsidies under the two instruments, we geo-locate the beneficiaries and develop a novel dataset showing the spatial and functional allocation of funds in the country. Using descriptive and applied spatial econometrics tools, we investigate the degree of geographical concentration of funds, along different priority areas, the regressiveness of redistributive character of these allocations, and their statistical association to existing spatial-geographical advantages and needs. Our evidence contributes to ongoing discussions about the perceived tension between industrial policy and cohesion policy interventions in Europe, under the recent shift towards policy activism in the field of industrial policy.

Presenter: Kevin Mulligan

Affiliation: Queen's Business School

Co-Authors: Helena, Lenihan, University of Limerick; Mauricio, Perez-Alaniz, University of Limerick

Climbing the Collaborative Research and Innovation Policy Support Ladder

Government financial supports for collaborative research and innovation (R&I) projects between Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), play a key role in regional innovation systems. Cultivating a pipeline of innovative SMEs at various growth stages is essential for regional growth and resilience. However, SMEs face significant knowledge and financial obstacles to start and sustain their pathway to innovation. Government-supported collaborations can supply an 'entry ticket' for SMEs to engage in innovation, and access the knowledge and infrastructure embedded in HEIs. Within this context, the current study examines what we term the 'Collaborative R&I Policy Support Ladder'. We conceptualise that SMEs climb this ladder, as they build their R&I capacity. Our focus is on how SMEs deal with the crucial 'second rung on the ladder', from small-scale to mid-scale collaborative funding support from Government. To address this issue, we build a comprehensive dataset which tracks the R&I and business performance activity of 5,128 SMEs based in Ireland from 2006-2021. The data captures SMEs that received initial small-scale support through an Innovation Voucher, which provides €5,000-€10,000 for academic-industry knowledge exchange. Further, the data enables tracking which firms go on to receive additional mid-scale collaborative R&I funding, for more advanced innovation projects. Using this data, our empirical analysis combines matching methods with a staggered difference-in-differences framework. This enables us to perform a robust evaluation of firms that transition from small-scale to mid-scale support, relative to a reliable control group. Our results suggest several important implications for regional innovation policy.

Presenter: Max Munday

Affiliation: Cardiff Business School

Co-Authors: Leon Gooberman, Cardiff Business School

The importance of multi-faceted embeddedness. Fifty years of Sony manufacturing operations in Wales

There has been a strongly contested debate across the UK regions on the economic contribution of foreign-owned plants to regional economic development prospects. Wales was relatively successful in attracting foreign-owned manufacturing capital in the 1970s and 1980s but many of the inward investments that came to the region at that time have since disinvested, sometimes seeking cheaper production bases in either East Europe of Asia. Yet there have been cases of plants that have been shown to be 'stickers' in the regional economy. This paper explores the case of one plant (Sony, Pencoed). The case examines the longevity of the plant to reveal different perspectives on its embeddedness. One perspective focuses on the nature of external subsidiary linkages with regional institutions. The second focuses on factors internal to the multinational whereby subsidiary entrepreneurship enabled the advantages of their external embeddedness to be understood throughout the Sony network. The paper argues that the multiple embeddedness perspective is important and with historical regional interventions to support inward investors perhaps too focused on a narrow understanding of subsidiary embeddedness which ignores the importance of supporting subsidiaries in integrating themselves in critical corporate networks.

Presenter: Ruth Neville

Affiliation: UCL Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis

Forecasting International Student Mobility in an Era of Uncertainty: From Patterns to Prospects

International student mobility is increasingly shaped by uncertainty, as geopolitical change, shifting policy environments, and global disruptions reshape established patterns of demand. This talk reflects on how our understanding of these dynamics has evolved, drawing on research spanning from explanatory analyses to recent forecasting approaches. I begin by revisiting established models of international student mobility, highlighting both their strengths and their limitations in capturing heterogeneous and non-linear patterns across countries. Using Brexit as a natural experiment, I show how policy shocks can reconfigure mobility systems in uneven and structured ways, with sharp declines in EU demand alongside more complex and differentiated responses across countries, institutions, and subject areas. Building on this, I present recent work forecasting international student demand to the UK using a combination of gravity models and machine learning methods. These results reveal a "concentration paradox": while overall demand is projected to slow or become more uncertain, it is increasingly concentrated among a small number of source countries, creating a system that is both more dependent and more vulnerable to future shocks. Taken together, these findings highlight a broader shift from analysing past patterns to anticipating prospects. I argue that forecasting offers not only predictive insight, but also a way of rethinking how mobility is theorised under conditions of uncertainty by revealing the vulnerabilities of the system as much as predicting its future. The talk concludes by outlining key challenges for future research in this area, while also reflecting on how our research questions, methods, and interpretations evolve through the research process.

Presenter: Peter Njekwa Ryberg

Affiliation: Jönköping International Business School

When specialization becomes repetition: The division of labor and routinization of work

This paper examines how the division of labor affects the routinization of work at the level of individual workers. Building upon the theory that the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market, I embed workers in local labor markets using linked employer-employee data and examine how the local density of economic activity impacts task specialization and in turn routine intensity. Task specialization and routine intensity are measured using granular survey data on workers' job tasks. I consider a mediation analysis framework where average treatment effects are obtained using an instrumental variable correlated random coefficients model. Historical data on railway passenger traffic instruments contemporary density and task specialization. The results indicate that density has a positive direct average treatment effect on task specialization, which fully mediates the relationship between density and routine intensity. Increasing density-induced task specialization by one standard deviation leads to an average increase of routine intensity by 7 percent. The average treatment effect is heterogenous by occupation, education, and industry, and grows in size at increasing levels of density.

Presenter: Lisa Noonan

Affiliation: Department of Economics, Cork University Business School, University College Cork

Overtourism, cultural attitudes and sustainable tourism

There has been a surge in interest in sustainable tourism activities in recent years; see for example: Bassi and Martín, 2024; Secondi et al., 2024; del Mar Alonso-Almeida, 2024. While the individual determinants that impact on the decision to engage in sustainable tourism activities, such as age, income and education have been considered in the literature, it is likely that individuals' activities are shaped by their own experiences and attitudes towards tourism in their home region.

Escapism, as a push factor for tourism, has long been considered in the literature (Dann, 1977; Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1982; Manell and Iso-Ahola, 1987). Escape motivated tourism suggests that individuals engage in holidays to avoid overstimulating life situations (Mannell and Iso-Ahola, 1987). Travelling to a recreational destination allows tourists to escape their everyday routines (Nikjoo and Ketabi, 2015) and a holiday can provide individuals with a 'break from routine' (Crompton, 1979). It is possible that individuals who experience the negative effects of overtourism in their everyday lives will want to escape unsustainable tourism patterns.

Similarly, cultural values shape the beliefs and perceptions that individuals develop in relation to sustainability as well as influencing their propensity to engage in sustainable practices (Tata and Prasad, 2015). This paper contributes to the literature by examining how the intensity of tourism activity in the individual's home region, as well as national attitudes towards sustainability, impact upon their decision to engage in sustainable tourism. Data from the Flash Eurobarometer on attitudes of Europeans towards tourism in 2021 is supplemented by data on European NUTS regions to conduct regression analyses. The results will be of interest policymakers and stakeholders in the European tourism industry.

Presenter: Conor O'Driscoll

Affiliation: University of Groningen

Stuck In Place: Local and Regional Perspectives on Residential Immobility

Every year, millions of households uproot their lives in search of better opportunities. But a hidden minority remain rooted in place despite their desire to join this search. While much attention in migration and labour market research has been devoted to understanding (labour) mobility and the circumstances under which individuals move, far less is known about those individuals who, for various personal, economic, or structural reasons, find themselves "stuck" in place. This paper focuses on these individuals by exploring the prevalence, determinants, and consequences of residential immobility. More specifically, I investigate who these people are, where they live (and work), what stops them from moving, and the socio-economic consequences of being "stuck" in place. To do this, I utilise individual-level longitudinal data, geocoded at the neighbourhood level, alongside highly refined spatial data from the UK spanning 2009-2019.

Presenter: Daragh O'Leary

Affiliation: University College Cork

Co-Authors: Stephen Brosnan, University College Cork; Hugh Farrell, University College Cork

Crime and High-Growth Firms: A First Look at an Important Relationship

We investigate the unexplored topic of crime increases and changes to a regional high-growth firm populations. Using Austrian regional data, we identify a negative and statistically significant association between growth in the number of crimes being committed in a region and change to the number of high-growth firms within that region. Interestingly, violent crime appears to have no statistically significant association with high-growth firm population change. Rather the significant negative association seems to be driven by increases in property-based crimes. Furthermore, the results of quantile regression estimates reveal that the negative association appears to be apparent only in regions with lower distributions of our high-growth firm variable.

Presenter: Anne Otto

Affiliation: Institute of Employment Research (IAB)

Co-Authors: Johannes Koenig

Staying in Germany after the doctorate. Regional and sectoral mobilities and career outcomes of Foreign Postdocs.

In recent decades, the higher education system of most OECD countries is characterized by a dynamic increase in the number of foreign PhD students being among the highest qualified workers. In times of a shortage of highly qualified talent, retaining doctoral graduates in the university region is very important in order to generate returns on public investment in education (Geissler/Koenig 2021), and to benefit for innovative activity (Hunt, Gauthier-Loiselle, 2010) and for economic activity (Ackers 2005). While there is a great literature on skilled international migration, studies on labour market outcomes of foreign Postdocs in destination countries are rather scarce (Tani, 2022). Hence, this leaves unresolved the issue for national economic and innovation policies in how successfull foreign scientists are on the labour market and in which segments of the labour market benefit most. The aim of this study is to shed light on the group of stayers - Postdocs who continue their careers in the destination country. We compare the regional and sectoral mobilities of foreign and non-foreign Postdocs in Germany and discrepancies in their career outcomes during the early career phase. First, we explore the stay rates of foreign and non-foreign Postdocs in the granting university region when they secure the first position after the doctorate. Second, we compare the sectoral mobilities and career outcomes of both Postdoc groups during the early career phase (up to three years after the doctorate). The focus is on career pathways in the academic and private sector and a set of labour market outcomes is studied such as fixed-term contracts, salaries, working time, management position and educational job matching. This enables us to detect whether there are considerable discrepancies between foreign and non-foreign Postdocs when transitioning into the labour market after graduation and whether initial differences diminuish over time. In a third step, regression analyses are conducted to analyse to what extent these sectoral differences in employment outcomes are marked by variation across disciplines and early-career research productivity. We resort to the IAB-INCHER-Panel database of Earned Graduates (IIPED) for Germany which enables us to trace postdocs‘ individual employment biographies before, during and after the doctorate.

Presenter: Martina Pardy

Affiliation: University of Liverpool

Co-Authors: Ron Mahabir, University of Liverpool; Fang Chen, University of Liverpool

Resources for Green and Built Environments: Leveraging Sentinel-2 and Machine Learning to Quantify Urban Assets for Social Science Research

The presence of nature and green spaces is a critical determinant of health and wellbeing across the UK. Exposure to green environments supports physical activity, reduces stress, and mitigates the effects of air pollution and extreme heat—factors central to the "Livable Cities" agenda. Despite its importance, research into deprivation and health inequality is often limited by the accessibility of granular environmental data. This paper introduces Resources for Green and Built Environments, a project designed to bridge the gap between environmental science and the social determinants of health by translating complex satellite data into actionable metrics for economists and social scientists.

Our methodology utilizes Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, processed through a range of machine learning algorithms—including clustering, Random Forest, and Deep Learning—to identify and categorize green space with high precision. To ensure policy-relevant accuracy, these models are trained and validated against official data sources, including the Planning and Housing dataset (planning.data.gov.uk) and OS Greenspace.

This work serves as a practical example of how novel methods and big data can be harnessed to provide evidence-based tools that are useful, usable, and used by the social science community. While this application focuses on green space, it represents the first step in a broader ambition to provide more detailed information on land-use heterogeneity. By providing a scalable framework for analyzing the built and natural environment, we aim to provide the foundation for more equitable, sustainable, and livable urban development.

Presenter: Irene Pathan

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Co-Authors: Mulligan Kevin, Queen's University Belfast; Rupietta Christian, Queen's University Belfast; Hassard Juliet, Queen's University Belfast; Roper Stephen, Warwick Business School.

From burnout to breakthrough: A systematic review of how psychosocial safety interacts with job demands and resources to influence firm-level and regional innovation

Psychological well-being has been incorporated into regional innovation systems mainly in terms of how it impacts income, growth, and productivity. However, many argue for a broader view. Regional context creates and shapes different well-being environments, leading to diverse patterns of capacities and motivations that influence innovation. This study provides a systematic literature review to examine how workplace Psychosocial Safety Climate (PSC) can create an enabling environment innovation in firms and regions. Growing evidence suggests that positive PSC is crucial for creativity. Moreover, the Job-Demand Resource (JDR) model in organizational psychology demonstrates how aspects of work design can influence employee psychological health and engagement, leading to improved firm-level innovation outcomes. To-date, research has focused on the innovation premium associated with individual factors within PSC (e.g. management commitment/priority) and JDR (e.g. job autonomy, social support, workload). However, theory suggests such factors do not function in isolation. Rather, different factors are inherently interdependent, combining in unique ways leading to specific innovation outcomes. Nevertheless, the mechanism through which PSC-JDR interactions influence innovation remains conceptually fragmented and empirically underexplored. This systematic review contributes to existing knowledge by clarifying how firms and regions can effectively create an environment conducive to innovation. The review synthesizes peer-reviewed studies published between 2000-2025 that investigate PSC-JDR dynamics and innovative outcomes. Using thematic analysis, this review maps out key trends, patterns, and themes. This review critically evaluates the theoretical and empirical evidence to identify key gaps in the PSC-JDR-innovation nexus and delineates a set of research questions to guide future research.

Presenter: Myles Patton

Affiliation: Ulster University Economic Policy Centre

Co-Authors: Barry Quinn, Ulster University

Productivity Growth and Employment Dynamics: Sectoral Heterogeneity, Cross-Sector Spillovers and Measurement Error in the UK

Weak productivity growth in the UK has prompted policy attention to productivity-enhancing reforms and technology adoption. While higher productivity is necessary for long-run growth, its effect on aggregate employment is theoretically unclear. Labour-saving technological change may reduce labour demand, but productivity improvements can also lower costs and increase demand through scale effects. Productivity growth may also generate cross-sector spillovers through input-output linkages and local income effects. The net employment effect depends on the relative strength of these channels.

This paper examines the productivity-employment relationship using a UK industry-region-time panel covering 1998-2023 (12 NUTS1 regions, 7 broad sectors). We use instrumental variables with Bartik shift-share instruments, incorporating region, industry and year fixed effects with a distributed-lag structure. Because asymptotic inference is unreliable with only 12 regional clusters, we complement the frequentist estimates with Bayesian hierarchical models and wild cluster bootstrap. We model measurement error in regional productivity data using a latent variable approach. The estimated reliability is around 0.70 (70% signal, 30% noise), which is substantial but typically ignored in regional productivity research.

We find strong sectoral differences in productivity-employment elasticities. Manufacturing, primary industries and knowledge-intensive services show large labour-saving effects. Consumer and local market services have a positive elasticity, consistent with demand-led expansion. Productivity growth in other sectors within the same region is associated with employment gains, particularly in administrative services and construction. A Bayesian variance decomposition shows that sectoral variation accounts for 70-90% of elasticity differences depending on measurement error correction, with regional variation contributing only 10-30%. These findings suggest that productivity–employment dynamics in the UK are predominantly structured along sectoral lines. This does not imply that spatial or place-based policies are unimportant, but rather indicates that national sectoral policies may be particularly influential in shaping the productivity–employment relationship, while place-based interventions may operate through sectoral composition, local complementarities and regional adjustment mechanisms.

Presenter: Mauricio Perez-Alaniz

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Co-Authors: David Bailey, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, Birmingham; Lukas Kuld, Department of Economics, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick; Helena Lenihan, Department of Economics, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick.

The liability of rurality and the effectiveness of R&D grants: Evidence from firms' constraints to innovation

Firm-level R&D grants are a central instrument of industrial and regional policy, intended to narrow economic and innovation gaps between core urban centres and non-core rural areas (Mieszkowski and Barbero 2021; OECD 2025). Yet firms located in rural areas may face a 'liability of rurality' arising from structural characteristics such as remoteness, low population density, and thinner labour and financial markets, which can constrain their ability to engage in R&D and innovation (Clausen 2020; Cowling et al. 2025). From a theoretical perspective, these constraints raise concerns about the effectiveness and efficiency of allocating R&D grants to rural firms. Such firms may struggle to readily translate public R&D grants into additional innovation and firm performance outcomes (Einiö 2014; Glaeser and Hausman 2020; Fitjar 2025). Despite the growing prominence of place-based innovation policy, empirical evidence on whether (and under what conditions) the liability of rurality conditions the firm-level impacts of R&D grants remains limited. As highlighted by Fitjar (2025, p. 1), in the context of the persistent spatial disparities in innovation activity between urban core and rural non-core areas, "the role of public R&D funding has largely been overlooked".

This study provides the first systematic evaluation of how the liability of rurality shapes the effectiveness of R&D grants at the firm level. We move beyond conventional rural–urban classifications, by developing novel mechanism-based measures of rural disadvantage. Specifically, using data for firms in Ireland, we construct county-level indicators reflecting firms' lack of internal financial resources, limited access to credit for R&D, and human capital constraints due shortages of qualified R&D personnel (D'Este et al. 2014; Afcha and Lucena 2022). These measures allow us to identify rural areas where firms are most exposed to the liability of rurality, and to test whether this conditions the impacts of R&D grants on firms' R&D, innovation and firm performance outcomes.

We draw on a newly constructed longitudinal dataset with information for firms in Ireland, covering the period 2006–2022. Our sample comprises 3,223 firm-year observations. To address selection and endogeneity concerns in grant allocation, we employ a combined propensity score matching and difference-in-differences approach (Vanino et al. 2019;

Lenihan et al. 2024). Our results suggest that R&D grants result in additional R&D expenditure and R&D employment by firms located in rural counties. Importantly, firms in counties most affected by financial constraints exhibit larger increases in R&D expenditure. By contrast, firms in counties least affected by human capital constraints tend to exhibit the highest increases in R&D employment. We do not find the liability of rurality to condition the firm-level innovation and performance outcomes of R&D grants. More specifically, R&D grants have similar firm-level impacts, in terms of innovation and performance outcomes, for firms located in counties affected and not affected by financial and human capital constraints.

By explicitly linking public R&D support to place-specific financial and human capital constraints, this study advances the literature on the spatial heterogeneity of R&D grant impacts (Einiö 2014; Tingvall and Videnord 2020; Mulligan 2024), and contributes to emerging debates on the geography of innovation policy (Fitjar 2025). From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that R&D grants alone may be insufficient to overcome rural innovation disadvantages in areas characterised by severe financial or human capital constraints. More effective place-based innovation strategies may therefore, require complementary interventions, such as skills development, labour mobility, or access-to-finance policies so as to enhance the absorptive capacity of rural firms and improve the returns to public R&D investment (Mieszkowski and Barbero 2021; OECD 2025).

Presenter: Maria Plotnkova

Affiliation: Aberystwyth University

Analysis of disability benefit claims' patterns in England and Wales

There has been a large increase in the number of people awarded disability benefits, Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in England and Wales between 2022 and 2025 (IFS, 2025). PIP is aimed to help compensate some of the living costs associated with disability; it is not means tested and does not depend on one's working status. The increase of roughly 50% between 2022 and 2025 has been far from uniform across space, ranging from 18% to 90% for local authorities. Joyce, Chaudhuri and Waters (2022) suggest the reason for the increase to be deterioration in health across all conditions that disability payments are granted for. A complimentary, economic explanation behind the increase and the persistence of the spatial pattern is that uneven uptake of health-related benefits by geographical areas indicates the problem of hidden unemployment (Beatty and Fothergill 2002; 2005; 2020; 2023). Regional and local job opportunities influence the decision to apply for disability benefits. The uptake of disability benefits is more pronounced in areas with lower job density, such as older industrial areas and many coastal towns (Beatty and Fothergill, 2023). The aim of this study is to ascertain the economic factors associated with the increase in PIP by local authorities. It first employs the shift-share analysis of PIP claims for 2022-2025 to suggest proximate explanations of how the PIP uptake evolved over the time period (Lahr and Ferreira 2020). A spatial econometrics model is then used to explain the spatial pattern of the increase in PIP claims. The dependent variable is the percentage increase in PIP claims between 2022 and 2025. The results indicate conditional "convergence" in claims levels as the 2019 stock of PIP benefit claims is negatively related to 2022-2025 PIP claims increase.

Presenter: Susann Power

Affiliation: Susann Power Ulster University Business School, Ulster University

Co-Authors: Amy Heaps, EPIC Futures NI, Ulster University Business School, Ulster University; Marian McLaughlin, School of Psychology, Ulster University; Kristel Miller, Ulster University Business School, Ulster University.

Place as Agency: An Investigation How Location, Locale and Sense of Place Shape Pathways for Returning to Work

Northern Ireland's labour market is challenged by a disproportionately high economic activity rate, accounting for 26.5% of those aged 16 to 64 (NISRA 2026), significantly above the UK average of 20.8%. This persistent labour market challenge is compounded by place-based factors, which influence the return to work for those currently unable to access suitable paid employment. In Northern Ireland, welfare-to-work services through Jobs and Benefits Offices (JBOs) fall under the remit of the Department for Communities, focussing on the role of people in facilitating return-to-work pathways. However, this research takes a more holistic approach by applying a more-than-human lens, whereby place becomes the principal agent of shaping behaviour. By situating the research at the intersection of public management agency theory and behavioural agency theory, this research aims to understand the agentic role of place in facilitating a return-to-work for economically inactive people. Findings are drawn from multiple sources. First, a skills development and economic inactivity module of 10 questions was commissioned via the annual Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2024, eliciting place-based attitudes about lifelong learning, employment pathways and the Northern Irish benefit system, yielding 1199 responses. Second, 15 in-depth interviews with Northern Ireland-based work coaches offered deep insights into the activities and problems of welfare-to-work frontline workers. Finally, 26 in-depth interviews with economically inactive residents provided a deeper understanding of how the 'geographical self' (Casey 2001) influences return-to-work pathways. By adopting an 'emplaced agency' (Sacks 1997) lens mirrored in location (territorial and physical place attributes), locale (social and relational place attributes) and sense (psychological place attributes), this research demonstrates that in Northern Ireland, social norms and place belongingness remain strongly embedded in a welfare and benefit culture. However, a strong sense of place has also shown to support trajectories for self-employment. The data has revealed that the rural-urban-nexus as well as physical environments impact the success of welfare-to-work programmes. Moreover, employment policy is shaped by place norms and beliefs. Additionally, place location and locale both influence opportunity and capability to return to work. The findings benefit place-focused policy design in the welfare-to-work context. The research

concludes by providing a framework of place location, locale and sense and how each of these can actively shape labour market and employment policy.

Keywords: Place, Agency Theory, Northern Ireland, Economic Inactivity, Geographical Self

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Place as Agency: An Investigation How Location, Locale and Sense of Place Shape Pathways for Returning to Work

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Presenter: Neil Rowland

Affiliation: Queen's University Belfast

Co-Authors: Duncan McVicar, Queen's University Belfast; Ian Shuttleworth, Queen's University Belfast

Catholic-Protestant Unemployment Differentials in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the Republic of Ireland 1991-2011: A Comparative Study

We use census-based microdata to compare Catholic and Protestant unemployment rates in Northern Ireland, Scotland and the Republic of Ireland in 1991, 2001 and 2011. Despite differences in Catholic population shares and the extent to which institutions of the state are thought to have advantaged one group over another, unemployment rates for Catholics were higher in all three countries. We assess the extent to which this can be explained by measurable differences in productive characteristics between Catholics and Protestants in each country and, by comparing across countries, the extent to which unexplained gaps might reflect labour market discrimination.

Presenter: Nicholas Sweeney

Affiliation: University of Mnachester

Spatial Variation in Mobility Across England: Evidence from 21 Million Geo-coded Credit-Card Flows

Data limitations have restricted understanding of how mobility varies across space, despite its importance for analysing spatial interactions and place-based policies. I geo-code over 21 million quarterly Visa and Mastercard origin–destination transactions (2019Q1–2023Q3) to estimate postcode-level distance-decay gradients for 2,118 districts via Maximum Likelihood Estimation. Mobility varies markedly along socio-economic ('intrinsic') and built-environment ('extrinsic') dimensions. The shortest mobility horizons occur in the most deprived urban areas, which complete half of their spending within 9.8 minutes—over three times faster than prosperous peripheral-urban areas. Spatio-temporal patterns reveal widening mobility inequalities and differential resilience to COVID-19.

Presenter: Emmanouil Tranos

Affiliation: University of Bristol

Co-Authors: Cait Robinson

Digital shadows: the places where broadband infrastructure doesn't reach at full speed

This paper aims to expose the places that are consistently underserved by digital infrastructure and assess whether how such low levels of infrastructural provision are associated with their developmental trajectories. While digital infrastructure and, more specifically, broadband networks continually improve, there are still important disparities among places and the level of service they experience. For this paper we employ a unique, longitudinal, stream dataset of individual internet speed tests to assess the quality of the digital infrastructure. Instead of focusing on internet speeds advertised by internet service providers, we develop novel metrics to reveal the quality of the internet infrastructure as experienced by internet users. The first part of the analysis, which is based on sequence analysis, reveals a lower tier of Local Authorities, which consistently underperform in terms of the experienced service, despite the overall technological improvement of digital networks. Having mapped and discussed these geographical patterns of the places that have been left behind the digital frontier, our modelling endeavours focus on revealing the characteristics of these places and how such low levels of digital infrastructure are associated with their developmental trajectories.

Presenter: Emmanouil Tranos

Affiliation: University of Bristol

Co-Authors: Leonardo Castro-Gonzalez; Emerald Dilworth; Levi John Wolf; Rui Zhu

Building an Atlas of Economic Activities

This paper aims to contribute to the discovery and, consequently, analysis of economic activities over space and time by leveraging the wealth of web data. Despite the evolving nature of economic activities, to classify them into industries we use static and top-down systems, which are often dated. In the UK, the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes have not been updated since 2007. To overcome this, we are utilising self-descriptions of economic activities on commercial websites and develop a novel computational framework that will allow to continuously map and monitor established and emerging (e.g. fintech, medtech) economic activities.

Despite the vast potential of web data for uncovering economic phenomena, accessing and analysing such datasets at scale has remained a significant challenge for social scientists. To overcome this, we are developing an open-source computational framework that enables large-scale, longitudinal analysis of web data, particularly from archives like the Common Crawl, to create, bottom-up, flexible and up-to-date typologies of economic activities.

Two are the main challenges. Firstly, we need to mine very large quantities of archived web data. Then, we need to effectively analyse the text form these websites in order to create meaningful typologies of economic activities. Our workflow allows us to geolocate these data and, importantly, analyse spatial patterns of concentration and specialisation. Additionally, we can go back in time and build such typologies for previous years.

Our data product, which will be based on open data and workflows, has the potential to directly contribute to local and regional economic analysis as it will offer new and up-to-date lenses of the industrial structure of places.

Presenter: Zhelyazko Tsachev

Affiliation: PhD Candidate, Department of Regional Development, Faculty of Economics, Trakia University, Bulgaria

Do local leaders in Bulgaria support decentralisation and of what kind?

Decentralisation has long been discussed as a way to strengthen local governance and improve the delivery of public services. In practice, however, decentralisation takes different forms and does not always mean the same thing for local governments. This paper asks whether local leaders in Bulgaria support decentralisation in general, or whether their support depends on the specific type of reform being considered.

The study draws on an original survey carried out in 2025 among mayors and settlement heads in Bulgarian municipalities in the South-Central Planning Region. The questionnaire focuses on local leaders' views on fiscal decentralisation, administrative autonomy in public service provision, and broader governance reforms. It also captures how local leaders perceive their own level of autonomy in decision-making. Municipality size is included as a contextual factor.

The analysis uses chi-square tests to examine whether different attitudes towards decentralisation tend to appear together. Rather than making causal claims, the paper looks for patterns in preferences across different policy dimensions. In particular, it explores whether support for fiscal decentralisation differs from support for administrative and governance-related reforms, and whether these attitudes are associated with perceived autonomy and municipality size.

By focusing on the perspectives of local political actors, the paper contributes to discussions on regional policy and multilevel governance in unitary states. It highlights the importance of understanding how decentralisation reforms are viewed at the local level, especially in contexts where responsibilities are shared across multiple tiers of government. From a policy perspective, the study underlines the need to take local leaders' preferences into account when designing decentralisation reforms, in order to improve their relevance and long-term effectiveness.

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The Missing Majority: Everyday Entrepreneurship in Subnational Alternative Economic Policy

New approaches to economic policy that move away from typical high growth entrepreneurship and high tech innovation towards more inclusive and sustainable approaches to developing economies are taking hold at a local and regional level with national government slower to move (Tuckerman et al., 2026). We argue that this shift in focus requires a stronger emphasis on types of everyday entrepreneurship which has typically had little representation in economic policy. Everyday enterprises as these we posit, are key to (re)embedded economic activity in the social worlds around us (Polanyi, 1944). Everyday entrepreneurs often have a stronger tie to place, are seen as 'neighbours' in their communities (Rahman and Norman, 2016).

Our research question is "To what extent are family and everyday entrepreneurship discussed in subnational alternative economic policy, and how are they framed in relation to sustainability issues?" We seek to understand whether this shift in policy paradigm away from GDP approaches to economic development includes a change in focus on foundational actors (namely family and everyday entrepreneurs).

We build on Crisp et al (2024) and identify case studies from across the UK and Ireland of subnational governments who are adopting community wealth building, foundational economy, inclusive growth, donut economics and/or wellbeing economy approaches. We conduct a qualitative framing analysis to understand the extent, and ways in which family and everyday entrepreneurship are discussed. We used concordancing as a discourse analysis technique which has been used in similar analytical environments (Purna et al., 2025; Tuckerman et al., 2024). In doing so, we make two contributions, firstly we create a better understanding of the ways in which policy diffusion of alternative economies is being operationalised, and secondly, we outline under what conditions in alternative economy language masking status quo approaches.

Presenter: Matt Whearty

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A delineation of functional urban regions in England and Wales for the purposes of urban economic research

The question of how a region should be demarcated is foundational in regional science, and especially consequential in UK urban economic research, where project results are often highly sensitive to the boundaries adopted. Existing delineation approaches for urban and labour-market areas are poorly suited to agglomeration-focused analysis because they do not centre clusters of economic activity or the urban-rural distinction.

This project addresses the absence of urban delineations for England and Wales that explicitly engage with the agglomeration economy, providing future researchers with a spatial basis for agglomeration research projects. A two-stage approach is used, first identifying concentrations of agglomeration-sensitive employment, then using Census origin-destination data to delineate the commuter hinterlands associated with those concentrations. Varying jobs density and commuting threshold parameters generates a family of functional region specifications that can be used to test the robustness of subsequent empirical results.

The resulting regions broadly align with the intuitive economic geography of England and Wales, with a large London region and smaller catchments around regional economic centres. However, the focus on agglomeration-sensitive employment generates counter-intuitive results in South East England, raising questions of monocentricity and polycentricity, and highlighting the importance of project purpose in urban delineation.

These findings will provide the foundation for future exploration of how the transport and housing infrastructure contribution to urban agglomeration economies in England and Wales varies between different urban regions. Policymakers can draw on my results to obtain a greater understanding of where areas of residence are genuinely economically integrated with centres of economic activity, supporting more targeted decisions about transport and housing investment.

Presenter: Levi Wolf

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SLA or Nay? Causal effects of Selective Licensing Areas on Rental Market Outcomes

Regulation of the private rental sector is critical for a just urban system. While the effects of city-wide (or national) rental regulations for quality or price movements affect all properties within a common housing market, neighborhood-level regulations, like Selective Licensing Areas or Rent Pressure Zones, only affect the houses that fall within a specific urban ward. This presents opportunities for spatial arbitrage in the urban housing market, as properties that are functionally identical on either side of a neighborhood-level regulation zone will have different outcomes, and policy effects can spill over outside of the regulation zone. Further, important dimensions of the rental market are interdependent: regulation of rent levels has significant impacts on housing, quality and availability, and vice versa. Hence, this abstract investigates whether the introduction of selective licensing areas, a neighborhood-level housing quality regulation, substantially affected the dynamics of rent growth in Bristol, using a unique within-property rent change dataset.

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Parking and Commuting Behaviour: Modelling the Mode Choice Impacts of Employer-Paid Parking in Ireland

Employer-paid parking is recognised as a structural incentive that reinforces private car commuting by lowering the perceived marginal cost of driving and embedding car dependency into workplace travel norms. In urban areas where congestion, emissions, and land-use pressures are increasing, such parking subsidies may represent a significant barrier to sustainable commuting by lowering the relative attractiveness of public transport, walking, cycling, and shared mobility options. Despite international evidence, limited research has examined the behavioural influence of employer-paid parking within the Irish policy and institutional context, where large employers play a pivotal role in shaping urban commuting patterns.

This study investigates the effect of employer-paid parking on commuting mode choice in an Irish urban area, using a discrete choice experiment (DCE) administered to staff at an Irish university. The research is conceptually grounded in behavioural economic theory and transport demand management, framing employer-paid parking as a form of implicit income transfer that distorts travel decision-making by masking the true costs of car use. By providing "free" or subsidised parking, employers reduce price sensitivity and create path dependency, discouraging modal shift even where sustainable alternatives are available. The study also draws on theories of choice architecture, highlighting how workplace benefits influence habitual commuting behaviour beyond purely rational cost-time trade-offs.

The discrete choice experiment (DCE) survey presents respondents with 16 sets of hypothetical parking choice tasks that vary across four attributes: parking fee, parking search time, proximity to the workplace, and perceived security. Stated preference data are analysed based on random utility theory using choice modelling approaches, including multinomial logit, latent class, and mixed logit models, to evaluate trade-offs between parking attributes and respondents' willingness to pay. The study examines relative sensitivity to parking attributes (e.g., cost sensitivity) by incorporating heterogeneity into the modelling framework. The findings are intended to inform a parking model aimed at addressing implicit subsidies for car use and identifying appropriate strategies to encourage more sustainable commuting behaviour.

The survey was conducted in early 2025, and this paper presents preliminary results, including respondents' parking preferences and the relationship between personal characteristics, parking preferences, and commuting choices.

The project's findings will provide empirical evidence on the extent to which employer-paid parking suppresses demand for sustainable modes in Irish urban areas and demonstrate the potential effectiveness of parking reform as a transport demand management tool. The results contribute to Irish sustainable mobility policy by identifying employer parking provision as a critical lever for reducing car dependency in urban commuting systems.