



Conference proceedings

LEADERSHIP, POLITICS, & GOVERNANCE

IN TURBULENT TIMES:

Global and Geopolitical Challenges in a Changing Europe

14 – 15th March 2024

Prague University of Economics and Business

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PRAGUE UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS

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Debriefing on the International Conference on Leadership, Politics, & Governance in Turbulent Times

Martin Pěluča, Martina Kubíková, John Shutt, and Joyce Liddle

Introduction

On 14th and 15th March 2024, an international conference entitled “*Leadership, Politics, & Governance in Turbulent Times: Global and Geopolitical Challenges in a Changing Europe*” was successfully held, organised by the Department of Regional Studies of the Faculty of Economics, Prague University of Economics and Business, in cooperation with other European universities. The conference was a thematic continuation of a series of conferences already held in May 2023 in Newcastle (Northumbria University, UK) and in October 2023 in Angers (ESSCA School of Management, France).

This year’s conference in Prague was attended by around 50 participants over the two days of the conference, with 40 participants in person and 10 online. The conference featured presentations by leading experts in the field of Leadership studies, including Prof. Markku Sotarauta (Tampere University, Finland), Prof. Joyce Liddle and Prof. John Shutt (Northumbria University), Prof. Ignazio Cabras and Thomas Hoerber (ESSCA School of Management), and others. Among the Czech lecturers we can mention e.g. Assoc. Prof. Tomáš Hudeček (former Mayor of Prague) and Assoc. Prof. Marian Piecha (Ministry of Industry and Trade).

Thematic starting points of the two previous Leadership Agenda conferences

The first conference took place at Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University (UK) in May 2023, as part of the first Pan-Northern Branch event organised by the RSA North East Branch. The conference served as an initial key meeting to bring together representatives from the participating institutions and other key research and university workplaces outside Europe (e.g. New Zealand). The conference focused on aspects of (either/or) theory and concepts, policy and practice(s) of leadership, and governance in transnational sub-national development settings.

The conference addressed a wide range of research questions, e.g. What is changing in the world of sub-national transnational cooperation and development? How is it changing and why? What are the implications of the new and uncertain contexts and local circumstances for leadership and governance in such settings? What does all this mean for the theory/conceptualisation, practice, and development of leadership and governance at this scale in a two-tier Europe?

The second conference took place in October 2023 at the ESSCA School of Management in Angers (FR). The conference, entitled “*Leadership & Sustainability in Europe: Where Now, What Next*” discussed the importance of networking and relationship building activities across both coterminous (land) and non-coterminous (sea/river/lake) national borders around the globe. The aim of the conference was to stimulate co-creativity, as well as knowledge sharing and learning for mutual benefit. This has long been a feature of sub-national urban and regional development. However, the strategic and operational conditions for transnational partnership, cooperation, and development at the sub-national level (between cities and regions) are not immune to emerging economic, social, and environmental challenges. In the aftermath of the recent Covid-19 pandemic crisis, governments around the world are still responding to multiple social and economic changes and other challenging events, such as the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, high inflation, and rising energy prices. The ongoing energy transition towards a more sustainable way of living and consuming has been severely affected by these events, which have created a rupture in the continuation of the transformation of energy systems towards a low (zero) carbon regime, as well as a formidable platform for a breakthrough leap from the old carbon-based system.

In such a context, the role of leaders and leadership is crucial in the design, development, and implementation of policies and initiatives. The European Union is an example of a region where public funding has already made a difference in the energy transition. The European Green Deal, the most ambitious project to decarbonise the EU economy, and the Next Generation EU Fund, launched by the European Commission, provide a strategic new multiannual financial framework for 2021–2027 to support the recovery and green transition of EU members. But how are these initiatives faring? Who is leading or lagging behind? And are there gaps to be filled, or excellence to be promoted in the transition across members and institutions? These questions were discussed at the second conference in Angers in October 2023.

Background to the thematic focus of the conference in Prague in March 2024

Leadership has been the subject of extensive academic discourse for many years (e.g. Beer et al., 2018; Sotarauta et al., 2017; Korompai et al., 2009, Nicholds et al., 2017; Collinge et al., 2011). However, the period between 2020 and 2023 has witnessed the emergence of entirely new and unprecedented challenges, presenting European societies with a concentrated set of dilemmas not seen for several decades. The historic event of Brexit, which marks the first withdrawal of a major member state from the European Union, has specific consequences and implications. In addition, the economic and social shutdown caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic in 2020–2021, coupled with the subsequent unparalleled financial support for recovery through significant fiscal and monetary expansion, has significantly altered the leadership landscape.

In addition, the new geopolitical context, resulting from the war in Ukraine and its subsequent impact on the economy in 2022, together with the migration crisis, has added to the complexity faced by leaders at supranational, national, regional, and even local levels. In these turbulent times, local and regional actors were responding to the above challenges in different ways and to varying degrees. It is clear that the migration crisis was overcome in a matter of weeks in the spring of 2022 thanks to exceptional leadership at all levels of the public and private sectors, with a strong dose of solidarity.

Dealing with the aftermath of the energy crisis, coupled with exceptionally high inflation rates in 2022–2023, due to a combination of the aforementioned factors, has further intensified the leadership pathways to be navigated. The confluence of these unprecedented challenges has called for a dynamic and adaptive approach to leadership, requiring leaders to redefine their strategies, adapt their decision-making processes and demonstrate agility in responding to evolving circumstances. Effective leadership in this context requires a comprehensive understanding of the interdependencies between different challenges, the ability to mobilise resources, and the capacity to foster collaboration between different stakeholders.

The effects of the energy crisis affected all actors, and were gradually resolved through a series of good practice examples, including progressive digitalisation and the use of SMART solutions. In the current programming period 2021–2027, EU countries have a wide range of different funding streams at their disposal, not only within the mainstream of EU Structural Funds, but also NextGenerationEU and a greater emphasis on financial instruments. This conference, therefore, focused on these links, drawing on concrete

examples and experiences of leadership at local, regional, and national levels. The key background questions for the presentations and subsequent discussion at the conference were: (1) What examples of good practice in local and regional governance have you seen in the period of the above factors? (2) What has been the experience of leadership in shaping the resilience of localities and regions in turbulent times?

Apart from the issues mentioned above, across both coterminous (land) and non-coterminous (sea/river/lake) national borders around the globe, important networking and relationship-building activity, that aims to stimulate collaborative problem solving and the co-creation of innovative projects and programmes, and to enable transnational knowledge exchange and learning for mutual benefit, has been a longstanding feature of sub-national city and regional development.

However, the strategic and operational conditions for transnational cooperation and development at the sub-national scale are not immune from acute and emerging 'grand challenges' across the economy, the society, and the environment. The combined impacts of rapid climate change and net zero energy transformations, health pandemics, the digital economy and innovative technologies, human migration, trans-frontier labour markets, identity politics, increased political insecurity, and war in Ukraine are creating a new leadership and governance context that is often uncertain and disrupting across Europe. New challenges, solidarities, and policies are emerging, but the complexities and policy integration demands are substantial.

Shutt, Liddle and Gibney (2021) identified four major ongoing and adaptive challenges for sub-national leadership. These are: (1) How to maintain and develop good ongoing dialogue beyond Brexit and between England and EU Local and Regional Authorities (hereafter, LRAs)? (2) How to adapt to the loss of 'privileged insider' status for UK LRAs? (3) How to adapt UK-EU LRA cross-border cooperation, capacity building and knowledge sharing to reduced access to funding? (4) How to counter the de-democratisation of EU affairs, and enable the sub-national voice?

In conclusion, the period from 2020 to 2023 has presented a unique set of circumstances that have tested the capabilities of leaders across Europe. From Brexit and pandemic-related disruptions to geopolitical shifts, migration crises, energy crises, and high inflation rates, the many challenges have required leaders to demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking. Navigating these factors has called for a new paradigm of leadership, that addresses the complexities of the contemporary landscape while upholding the values

and aspirations of the societies they serve. Effective leadership in this context requires a comprehensive understanding of the interdependencies between different challenges, the ability to mobilise resources and the capacity to foster collaboration among diverse stakeholders. By rising to the occasion and embracing the multifaceted nature of these challenges, leaders have the opportunity to shape the future trajectory of their countries, and make a lasting contribution to the well-being and prosperity of their citizens.

The Czech Republic, a medium-sized country in Central Europe, was actively engaged in a comprehensive analysis of the consequences of a period of turbulent developments. Prague University of Economics and Business is one of the key research institutions involved in this topic. This analysis goes beyond the realm of economic evaluation and into the realm of local and regional governance. These consequences have become an important focus for research projects at the Prague University of Economics and Business (Faculty of Economics, Department of Regional Studies). In particular, in a project funded by the Czech Science Foundation, we were addressing the issue of bridging the digital divide at the local level, with a particular focus on rural areas. At the same time, we were addressing the challenges of the transition process in coal regions, which are now facing the far-reaching consequences of the energy crisis, triggered by the war in Ukraine. It is noteworthy that the Czech Republic has experienced the highest per capita impact of the migration crisis, adding to the complexities that require our dedicated attention and scientific research.

This conference, therefore, aimed to bring together an international community of scholars who are interested in developing original perspectives from the fields of urban and regional development studies, economic and human/social geography, political science, policy and public administration studies, and cross-border studies. By organising and hosting three research conferences in 2023 and 2024 (Northumbria University, UK; ESSCA Ecole de Management, France; Prague University of Economics and Business, Czech Republic), we aimed to refresh interdisciplinary discussion and advance debate on our understanding and explanations of the drivers, dynamics, and outcomes of transnational leadership and governance in urban and regional development settings.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CONFERENCE

- **Refresh** the interdisciplinary discussion and advance the debate on our understanding and explanations of the drivers, dynamics, and outcomes of transnational leadership and governance in city and regional development settings. Local and regional leadership has grappled with a convergence of unprecedented circumstances in recent years (Brexit, Covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine). These intertwined challenges have required exceptional leadership, adaptability, and the ability to balance multiple priorities in rapidly changing circumstances.
- **Discuss** the current state of research, important new and emerging research questions and contextual paradigms in the study of city and regional (place) leadership. Also, to advance concepts of urban and regional (place) leadership and research methodologies, fostering a broader debate on the contributions of formal and informal leaders, and the dynamics of leadership in a variety of new and different urban and regional development contexts. By examining agency and relationships in disrupted and changing times, the network seeks to deepen our understanding of the unique challenges facing leaders across Europe. These challenges include Brexit, pandemic-related disruptions, geopolitical shifts, migration crises, energy crises and high inflation rates. The conference also advanced our understanding(s) and explanation(s) of agency and human relations in disrupted and changing times in urban and regional development.
- **Explore** the contextual role of leaders and leadership as critical to the design, development, and implementation of policies and initiatives. In addition to the aforementioned themes, the conference focused on various key areas that are critical for understanding and addressing the challenges of turbulent development and change in Europe.

The main topics that were discussed are related to the factors and current trends that have fundamentally influenced, and continue to influence, the leadership of actors operating at European, national, regional, and local levels. Fundamental topics were issues related to the influence of the current EU philosophical approach to shaping economic policy based on green growth, and strategically on a low-carbon or zero-emission economy in the 2050 horizon. This political-economic context was, and is, further influenced by the impact of pandemic measures on the situation in individual states, regions, and municipalities, as well as geopolitical trends related to the migration crisis (especially since 2015), and the impact of the war in Ukraine in a broader dimension, i.e. the energy crisis. The individual papers presented were focused on reflecting these trends from different perspectives in terms of the role, importance and possibilities of leadership.

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Leadership from the Czech Perspective of Recent Crises and External Shocks



From initial shock to future challenges: the complex issue of adaptation and integration of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic

Roman Matoušek

Ministry of Regional Development, Czech Republic

Abstract:

Czechia has the highest share of refugees from Ukraine per capita among member states of the EU (more than 380 000 people and 3 % of total population). Policy response to this situation has been shifting from emergency management of thousands of refugees arriving daily during first months after the war started in February 2022 to long-term support of adaptation and integration of Ukrainians of different backgrounds and capabilities in various urban and rural contexts of Czechia. Building on the author's involvement in policy design and coordination in this field, the presentation will reflect on changing priorities, actors, and forms of governance related to Ukrainian refugees.



Resilient city: Opportunities and limitations of urban responses to frequent, rare, and new crises

Tomáš Hudeček

University lecturer and former politician – Mayor of Prague 2013–2014, member of the European Committee of the Regions, Director of the Urban Development Department at the Institute for Planning and Development of the City of Prague 2021–2022

Abstract:

The city, like any other system, is subject to stressful situations for which it may be better or worse prepared. During periods of calm, it is necessary for cities to prepare for crises, and provide a more suitable response. The process of preparation and learning can be closer to learning from one's own experiences or, ideally, learning from the experiences of others. Only a minimum of cities experience absolutely unique crisis situations, for which it was not possible to adequately prepare. However, cities do not exist in a vacuum, and the private sector and other stakeholders can also play a significant role.



Transition and Challenges of Peripheries under Macroeconomic Shocks: Time to Merge?

Nikola M. Taylor

Prague University of Economics and Business

Abstract:

Peripheral locations, as with any other spatial units, face impacts of recent external macroeconomic shocks, and have to adapt to new macro and micro conditions. Local economies will soon operate under new administrative regulations which may affect their investment, as well as the quality and accessibility of public services provided to their citizens. The paper deals with the medium – term economic performance of municipalities in the Czech Republic, with a special emphasis on municipalities which are located in peripheral locations. The question of future merging of municipalities in order to enhance economic effectiveness and quality of public services will be discussed.



Framing of Leadership – From Local Challenges to Macroeconomics Shocks



Assoc. Prof. Łukasz Mamica



Assoc. Prof. Oto Potluka

Energy crisis in Europe – consequences and possibilities to mitigate its negative effects

Łukasz Mamica

Cracow University of Economics

Abstract:

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 set off a series of repercussions for Europe's energy security and broader energy politics. The ensuing energy crisis eroded the competitiveness of energy-intensive industries on the global stage. Particularly, the sharp rise in gas prices resulted in deteriorating economic metrics in nations where gas played a dominant role in the energy mix, such as Germany and Italy.

The impact of energy prices on economic competitiveness is exemplified through the manufacturing of chemicals and chemical products, as well as paper and paper products. This comparative analysis utilises EU-wide data, focusing on Poland and the Czech Republic – two neighbouring countries with contrasting energy compositions (coal-based in Poland and nuclear-based in the Czech Republic). The analysis examines changes occurring during the shift towards renewable energy sources, especially within Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), with specific attention to developments in the aftermath of the 2022 conflict.

In comparison to other regional nations, the urgency to reduce dependence on Russian fossil fuel supplies following the Ukraine conflict presented a relatively minor challenge for Poland and the Czech Republic. Systemic measures are being implemented in Poland to mitigate the adverse effects of energy crises and reduce energy insecurity.

Leading local change: what do we know about place leadership?

Markku Sotarauta and Andrew Beer

Tampere University

Abstract:

The scholarship and empirical research around place leadership have rapidly been established in the local and regional development literature. Notably, questions on place leadership have also found a way to be incorporated in policy discourses, ranging from resilience to devolution to the organisation of smart specialisation strategies, to name two of the most common subjects. In this paper, I take stock of what is known about the roles of place leaders in shaping local economic development and place-based transformation. The research questions are as follows: (a) What does the latest empirical research say about the roles of place leadership in driving transformation? (b) What type of leadership is needed at different times and places, e.g. in response to shocks or longer-term structural change of formulation of strategies? What roles can the public, private, and third sector play?



Prof. Markku Sotarauta

Urban Planning for Social Resilience in Urban Neighbourhoods: Transformative Change through Civic Engagement

Oto Potluka

Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) at the University of Basel

Abstract:

Citizens are increasingly taking the initiative in urban development, transforming their neighbourhoods through grassroots actions like urban gardening and public space design. This movement towards co-production highlights a gap in urban planning education, which often overlooks the role of community-led initiatives in fostering resilient, sustainable urban areas.

Focusing on the neighbourhood scale in urban planning and design integrates daily life issues, human interactions, and sustainability. This innovative approach fosters collaboration between civil society and municipal actors, promoting resilient, sustainable neighbourhood development through transnational exchange and ongoing dialogue.

We aim to:

(i) analyse to what extent civil society actors can take responsibility for ‘their’ neighbourhoods or communities; (ii) identify the potentials and risks associated with civic engagement concerning social resilience and democratic development; (iii) analyse what success do sustainable transitions and urban neighbourhoods achieve; (iv) examine the role of urban and regional planning in achieving social resilience and sustainability; (v) identify strategies for both civil society initiatives and urban planners to strengthen social participation, social resilience, democratic development, and urban sustainability; and (vi) contribute to a comprehensive understanding of resilient urban neighbourhoods.

Regarding urban planning and urban design, there is diversity in terms of content and learning outcomes of architecture, planning, and engineering modules across Europe. Our approach aims to bridge these gaps, and provide valuable insights for the future of higher education in urban planning and urban design modules. At the same time, stakeholders neglect social cohesion when they concentrate on technical emergencies. Planning is a suitable field where social cohesion principles could match, or build up, synergies with purely technical and environmental issues.

The potential and limitations of Czech industry and the business in the context of EU support in a period of turbulent changes

Marian Piecha

Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic

Abstract:

The potential of Czech industry is evident in its diverse sectors, ranging from manufacturing to technology, underpinned by a skilled workforce and strategic geographical positioning. EU funding offers avenues for further expansion of the Czech Republic. However, alongside these opportunities, Czech industry and business faced some limitations. In recent years, many companies have been struggling with energy prices and generally rising prices and a degree of uncertainty about the economy itself. Grant support helps these companies to overcome these challenges and return to growth more quickly. We now have a successful drawdown under the National Recovery Plan behind us. We are also in the middle of the programming period. So, the question is: What is the future of the European support now?



Leadership from the Perspective of European PhD Students



Martina Kubíková



Šárka Tomanová

Empirical reflection on the Czech energy crisis in 2022

Šárka Tomanová

Prague University of Economic and Business

Abstract:

In 2022, the European energy market experienced a major shock. The prices of energy commodities (electricity and natural gas) have increased by up to six times in six months, triggering a series of reactions from the government, regulators, and consumers. The significant price increase was triggered by the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the subsequent global reaction to the war in Ukraine. This contribution provides an empirical assessment of the situation in the Czech Republic, summarising the short-term interventions by the state and municipalities, which provided a response to the unpredictability and imminent collapse of the market, and the threat to energy security. The contribution also summarises strategic interventions and provides a critical reflection in the context of current economic policy in the Czech Republic.

Short-term interventions have been a clear response to the current economically unsustainable situation. But how do we evaluate strategic interventions in the Czech Republic? Are they only a response to the country's energy security, or does the ideology of interest groups play a role in the changing geopolitical situation? Can foreign experience provide a sober view of the situation in the Czech Republic?

Rewilding as a Nature-Based Solution? Policy implications of global climate changes in turbulent times

*Olena Shelvytska, Stanislava Brnkaľáková, Zuzana Sarvašová,
and Tatiana Kluvánková*

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava

Abstract:

Established in 1949, the Tatra National Park (TANAP) is the oldest and largest in area nature conservation in Slovakia, navigating turbulent climate change management in long-standing commitment to ecological preservation. To ensure the ecological integrity of the park, it is extremely important to have a comprehensive strategy that not only protects biodiversity, but also meets the needs of local residents. The questions are: How could the social components of ecological systems co-evolve together? What type of sustainable management could meet the greatest extent possible with minimal human touch and reduced footprint? The demand for resources should meet the new needs of societies. The rewilding concept can show how neutral climate change can be organised in order to respond to the challenges of climate change, thus contributing to sustainable development in different sectors (including economy), while preserving ecosystems and the well-being of nature and the community. Our aim is to demonstrate a case study of the National Park of High Tatras, leading to stability in saving and improving the quality of life. Employing the chosen experiment can determine value, public preferences of rewilding, long-term sustainability, and carbon neutral. In that way, climate-neutral smart change can actively contribute to a more economically sustainable and environmentally responsible future.

The Rare Earth Elements Market and Its Impacts on the European Printed Circuit Boards Market

Fanny Gantier

ESSCA School of Management

Abstract:

There are 17 rare earth elements, of which 15 belonging to the lanthanide family. Their exceptional properties enable them to withstand high temperatures, making them essential for next-generation technological products. As a result, these elements play a crucial role in various sectors such as military, aerospace, automotive, industrial, and electronic equipment. Although global reserves of these materials may be sufficient for the next four centuries, their extraction proves to be costly and unprofitable. With the growing demand, the market for these metals becomes increasingly critical. According to a 2016 study (Giannuli A), by 2010, 14 strategic metals were already identified as deficient, including 9 rare earths and 5 strategic metals (indium, lithium, cobalt, tellurium, and gallium).

The rare earth elements market has undergone significant changes over the past 15 years. Since the cessation of lanthanide exports by the United States in 2002, China has capitalised on the situation to assert its dominance and become the market leader. Currently, China holds 40% of the world's rare earth reserves and controls 95% of the global market. In 2009, China decided to reduce its exports by 28% and increase taxes. This operation persisted until 2013, reducing the supply possibilities from other countries and causing prices to rise. Between 2013 and 2015, several events marked this period. Firstly, in 2014, the World Trade Organization (WTO) condemned China for the restrictions it imposed on other countries by limiting exports, but also compelled China to reduce costs to facilitate the market. Secondly, in 2015, many companies faced unpaid bills or corruption investigations, forcing them to close or sell. Thirdly, many rare earths are produced illegally on the black market: 40,000 tons in 2013, compared to the 30,000 tons intended for export. Today, the Chinese rare earth market is more accessible, although a return to pre-2019 prices seems unlikely. However, our dependence on Chinese production persists. Given their use in the military and aerospace sectors, rare earths pose a high risk.

In 2011, during market tension, the European Commission explored finding alternative supply sources. Two possibilities were considered: firstly, the opening of an extraction industry in Sweden and Greenland, and secondly, the recovery of rare earths from landfill sites for recycling. In January 2023, LKAB discovered 1 million tons of rare earths in Kiruna, Sweden. To exploit this vast deposit, LKAB must obtain permits, implying a wait of 10 to 15 years before production begins. Another challenge lies in the presence of the Sámi population near the deposit, who would need to be relocated if mining operations commence.

Greenland presents a different situation: although it may be the second-largest reserve of rare earths after China, the country is open to various projects from different countries, not just European countries, to claim independence from Denmark. Hence, in 2021, three billionaire personalities, Michael Bloomberg, Jeff Bezos, and Bill Gates, signed an agreement with Bluejay Mining to open a rare earth mine on the west coast of the country. Although Denmark and other countries have numerous rare earth mining projects in Greenland, the greatest challenge lies in climate change, which has a much more significant impact on Greenland than on other countries. Indeed, rare earth mining is highly polluting, generating radioactive waste, and requiring the use of chemicals for their separation. Rare earth extractions lead to environmental, geopolitical, and social issues in both Chinese and European operations under construction, such as in Denmark and Sweden.

Another solution is to recycle rare earth metals. Currently, less than 1% are recycled due to their low presence in today's finished products. However, some countries are looking to develop this approach to become independent of China. This is particularly the case for Japan, the second-largest consumer of rare earth metals in its electronic market. Japan's ambition is to strengthen its rare earth metals supply by reusing the metals in urban mines.

- What is the impact of the rare earth metal's market on European electronic board manufacturing, as rare earth metals are mainly produced in China?
- What risks are implied for European production?
- What are the other sources of supply for these rare earth metals for European societies?
- Would recycling enable us to get out of this dependence on China, and be more environmentally friendly?

Leadership in the Context of Entrepreneurship and Business Development



Prof. Joyce Liddle

Assoc. Prof. Marian Piecha



Effectiveness of Czech Support Programmes for SMEs

Veronika Špírková

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Abstract:

Public support is an important tool for stimulating innovation, competitiveness, and sustainability of enterprises. However, the provision of public support is also associated with a number of challenges, such as administrative complexity, distortions of competition, or inefficiency in the use of public funds. In this paper, we focus on the analysis of the effectiveness of public support for entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic, using data that are mainly from operational programmes for entrepreneurs, or from the National Recovery Plan. The paper assesses the impact of different forms of public support, including direct grants, loan guarantees, preferential loans, and capital investments, and examines how these can be optimised to maximise their impact.

The possibilities and limits of government leadership in setting up and managing investment incentive systems in times of geopolitical crises, decarbonisation processes, and the onset of Industry 4.0 trends

Lucie Jarešová

Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade, Prague University of Economic and Business

Abstract:

The main role of the investment incentives is to foster economic development by attracting foreign direct investment and stimulating domestic investment. An investment incentive system is also an integral part of national economic policies, and it is a specific tool through which the government can respond directly to economic stimuli taking place in domestic and foreign markets; nevertheless, its effect is often questioned and debated.

This contribution presents the government leadership in establishing and overseeing an investment incentive system in Czech Republic in the past four years, during multifaceted challenges such as geopolitical crises, the decarbonisation imperative, and the continuing development of Industry 4.0. In an era that is marked by increasing global uncertainties, governments play a fundamental role in fostering economic resilience and innovation. This study further investigates the possibilities and inherent limitations that the government faces in developing effective strategies to attract and manage investments amidst geopolitical turbulence. It also delves into the intricate balance that is required to align investment incentives with the pressing need for sustainable practices, as nations face the decarbonisation imperative. Furthermore, the study explores the challenges and opportunities posed by the onset of Industry 4.0. trends, and emphasises the role of government in leveraging technological advancements to stimulate economic growth. Further, this study aims to shed light on the complex interplay between government, investment incentives, and the broader-economic and environmental context.

Leadership and Green transition in turbulent times

From right to left
Assoc. Prof. Oto Potluka,
Prof. Thomas Hoerber,
Prof. Ignazio Cabras,
Ing. Martina Kubíková



Prof. John Shutt

Euroecology – Mezzo climate change

Thomas Hoerber

ESSCA School of Management

Abstract:

In the past, two concepts have been developed by the present author, which aim to analyse European sustainability policies.

Firstly, the European environmental conscience (Hoerber, 2013) was proposed as an explanation why European integration was progressing fast in the sector of sustainable development. It was characterised by a concentration of expertise at the EU level. Rightly so, because the problem of environmental degradation was no respecter of frontiers and thus it was too big for any Member State to solve by itself. And consequently, all European peoples want this problem solved, because they all felt the consequences of environmental degradation.

Secondly, Ego-ecology (Hoerber, Kurze, Kuenzer, 2021) outlined the nationalist perversions of an environmental conscience, and also the potential that such national or local environmental motivations could have in opening nationalist logic towards the necessity to finding a solution on a larger scale, i.e. at the EU

This article takes both rationales further, and asks the question of whether environmental protection pays for anyone if the others continue polluting. Based on present and historical examples (e.g. the London smog and the Beijing smog), the author posits that there may be an intermediate size of territory between localities and the world (mezzo level) at which environmental protection produces immediate benefits. Where this mezzo level lies would have to be determined in collaboration with climate scientists; hence, for this article, I will simply develop the thesis.

Energy transition and leadership context in Czech Coal Regions

Martin Pelucha

Prague University of Economics and Business

Abstract:

Regions in transition to a low-carbon (or zero-carbon) economy face a number of challenges, in terms of their socio-economic development. This process is particularly problematic in the case of coal regions, which are targeted by the new specific Just Transition Fund in the programming period 2021–2027. In the Czech Republic, three coal regions are most affected by this process: Moravian-Silesian, Ústí, and Karlovy Vary regions. Each of them has different initial conditions for the current transition processes. The presentation focuses on the assessment of the institutional readiness and the recognition of the leadership role of all three Czech coal regions, in accordance with the results of a specific empirical survey that was carried out in 2024.



Leading the transition to a green European economy: The UK and EU Perspective

John Shutt

Northumbria University

Abstract:

The United Kingdom seems to be retracting on the UK Green Deal. Firstly, the Sunak government backtracked, and now Labour has had to abandon its £28bn green deal plans, due to concerns about the markets, costs, and the UK economy.

The evidence suggests that the UK net-zero economy is growing, with over 80,000 jobs created and approximately 765,000 green jobs, according to the Energy and Climate Intelligence Unit (ECIU) and the Confederation of British Industry. British cities once led the Green Deal, and some combined authorities like Teesside may still be doing so. However, the financial crisis of UK local government has halted progress. London's Sadiq Khan heads up the C40 Cities global network of nearly 100 European mayors.

The focus now is on the European elections in June 2024 and the strengthening of the European Green Deal. Can the European Green Deal be kept on track, and can European cities remain at the forefront of the green transition? This is the question that Amsterdam and other cities are asking. Copenhagen, Paris, and Prague are leading the way in green industrial policy and city/regional leadership. However, it is unclear if European is substantially different from capacity building in the United Kingdom. Additionally, it is important to consider if there is enough emphasis on creating green jobs.

Nuclear Energy, Environmental Conflicts and Place Leadership in the European Union

Ignazio Cabras and Gabriel Weber

ESSCA School of Management, Northumbria University, Newcastle

Abstract:

The COVID-19 outbreak and the following pandemic crisis forced businesses, factories, and industries worldwide to cease activities for prolonged periods. During this time, however, Nuclear Power Plants (NPPs) worldwide continued their operations, providing much needed electric power to households, hospitals, and businesses.

In its proposed green finance taxonomy, a classification system that defines environmentally sustainable economic activities, the European Union (EU) Commission labelled nuclear energy as sustainable and, therefore, eligible for EU funds and investments. The European Parliament (2022) backed this proposal, despite a few EU member states that aimed to block the legislative process. This example reflects the deep contrasts among EU member states, over how to fight climate change, and what can be considered sustainable; and highlights multiple challenges associated with NPPs, in view of achieving environmental, energy, and climate justice in Europe.

This study addresses these challenges by examining local environmental conflicts, that are related to nuclear energy, which have been identified across EU member states, regarding understanding the impact of leadership approaches in different places across local countries and communities. Empirical results indicate two main issues related to EU NPPs. Firstly, while member states (e.g. Bulgaria and Hungary) had been asked to withdraw older NPPs as a pre-condition for joining the EU, other EU member states (e.g. Belgium and France) continue to operate outdated and precarious reactors. Secondly, NPPs and nuclear waste facilities are often imposed on low-income rural communities, exposing them to high risks associated with radioactive pollution. The analysis presented in the paper explores these issues, considering different place leadership approaches within a very fluid EU political context characterised by post-pandemic challenges, including the ongoing Ukrainian-Russian conflict. Findings provide insights to academics, practitioners, and policymakers in relation to NPPs and future EU energy strategies.

Programme of the conference

Place Leadership in Europe: Research Seminar Series 2023-2025
**Leadership, Politics, & Governance in Turbulent Times:
Global and Geopolitical Challenges in a Changing Europe**

Day 1: March 14th 2024 – Prague University of Economics and Business

8:30 – 9:30 **Registration, coffee/drinks**

09:30 – 10:00 Welcome & Introduction to the conference

Speakers:

- **Prof. Martin Pelucha**, Prague University of Economics and Business. *Conference opening words*
- **Representatives of the University – Faculty of Economics. Dr. Adéla Zubíková**, Statutory Deputy Dean, **Assoc Prof Helena Chytilová**, Vice-Dean (International Relations), *Welcome speech*
- **Prof. Joyce Liddle, Prof. John Shutt**, Northumbria University, **Dr. John Gibney**, University of Birmingham.
Leadership – information on the forthcoming special issue of Regional Studies

10:00 – 11:45 Session I

Leadership from the Czech Perspective of Recent Crises and External Shocks

Speakers:

- **Mr. Roman Matoušek**, Czech Ministry of Regional Development. *From initial shock to future challenges: the complex issue of adaptation and integration of refugees from Ukraine in the Czech Republic*
- **Assoc Prof. Tomáš Hudeček**, University lecturer and former politician – Mayor of Prague 2013–2014, member of the European Committee of the Regions, Director of the Urban Development Department at the Institute for Planning and Development of the City of Prague 2021–2022.
Resilient city: Opportunities and limitations of urban responses to frequent, rare, and new crises
- **Dr. Nikola M. Taylor**, Prague University of Economics and Business.
Transition and challenges of peripheries under macroeconomic shocks: Time to Merge?

11:45 – 13:00 **Lunch break**

13:00 – 15:00 Session II

Framing of Leadership – From Local Challenges to Macroeconomics Shocks

Speakers:

- **Prof. Dr. Habil. Łukasz Mamica**, Krakow University of Economics.
Energy crisis in Europe – consequences and possibilities to mitigate its negative effects
- **Prof. Markku Sotarauta and Prof. Andrew Beer**, Tampere University.
Leading local change: what do we know about place leadership?
- **Assoc. Prof. Oto Potluka**, Center for Philanthropy Studies (CEPS) at the University of Basel.
Urban Planning for Social Resilience in Urban Neighbourhoods. Transformative Change through Civic Engagement
- **Assoc. Prof. Marian Piecha**, Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade. *The potential and limitations of Czech industry and the business in the context of EU support in a period of turbulent changes*

15:30 – 17:00 Session III

Leadership from the Perspective of European PhD Students

Speakers:

- **Ms. Šárka Tomanová**, Prague University of Economics and Business.
Empirical reflection on the Czech energy crisis in 2022
- **Ms. Olena Shelvytska**, STU in Bratislava, Slovakia, **Ms. Stanislava Brnkaľáková, Ms. Zuzana Sarvašová and Prof. Tatiana Kluvánková**, Board of European Students of Technology Bratislava, Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava.
Rewilding as Nature Based Solution? Policy implications of global climate changes in turbulent times
- **Ms. Fanny Gantier**, ESSCA School of Management. (on-line presentation)
The Rare Earth Elements Market and Its Impacts on the European Printed Circuit Boards Market

19:00 Conveners' dinner

9:00–10:45 Session IV

Leadership in the Context of Entrepreneurship and Business Development

Speakers:

- **Ms. Veronika Špírková**, Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade. Prague University of Economics and Business.
Effectiveness of Czech support programmes for SMEs
- **Ms. Lucie Jarešová**, Czech Ministry of Industry and Trade. Prague University of Economics and Business.
The possibilities and limits of government leadership in setting up and managing investment incentive systems in times of geopolitical crises, decarbonization and Industry 4.0 processes
- **Prof. Joyce Liddle**, Northumbria University.
Local and regional leadership in the context of international cases in public sector entrepreneurship – reflection of the book preparation

10:45 – 11:15

Coffee break

11:15–13:15 Session V

Leadership and Green transition in turbulent times

Speakers:

- **Prof. Thomas Hoerber**, ESSCA School of Management.
Euroecology, Mezzo climate change
- **Prof. Martin Pelucha**, Prague University of Economics and Business.
Energy transition and leadership context in Czech Coal Regions
- **Prof. John Shutt**, Northumbria University.
Leading the transition to a green European economy: The UK and EU Perspective
- **Prof. Ignazio Cabras** and **Prof Gabriel Weber**, ESSCA School of Management.
Nuclear Energy, Environmental Conflicts, and Place Leadership in the European Union

13:15–13:30 Closing words

Speakers:

- **Prof. Martin Pelucha**
- **Prof. John Shutt**

Information about the special issue on LEADERSHIP in the journal Regional Studies – 2025/2026



RSA Regional Studies
Association

Research Today, Policy Tomorrow

The work in this seminar network series builds on the research networks of the Regional Studies Association in previous periods – see:

<https://www.regionalstudies.org/network/leadership-and-urban-and-regional-development/>

Many of the contributors are contributing towards a special issue of Regional Studies which will be finalised in 2025/6, provisionally developed as follows

Update on progress with the Special Issue of Regional Studies Journal (as of November 2024)

John Gibney, Joyce Liddle, John Shutt and Markku Sotarauta (Guest Editors) (forthcoming 2025) **Leadership in city and regional development: new perspectives from within and beyond borders.** A themed Special Issue of Regional Studies journal.

So far three papers have been accepted and a further ten papers are currently being revised following (2nd stage) peer review. Two accepted papers are already available for early consultation as e-publications. These are:

- McClelland, A.G., Shaw, D. and Scully, J. Legitimacy and place leadership: responding to and recovering from disruption in soft spaces.
- Horlings, L.G. and Wills, J. Sub-national leadership in response to environment and climate change.

A third accepted paper is currently being formatted by Regional Studies and will appear shortly also as an early e-publication:

- Morrison, A. and Gong, H. Place leadership in developing emerging controversial industries: the case of blockchain in two Swiss cantons.

The Guest Editors anticipate that all final versions of the accepted papers and the covering editorial and discussion paper will appear in print in the full final SI collection by early summer 2025.

Overview	
Proposed title	Working title: Leadership in city and regional development: new perspectives from within and beyond borders.
Subject areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership change, transition, and disruption across sub-national and transborder economy, society, and environment. • Place leadership • Human relations across sub-national/transborder city & regional development • Leadership learning across sub-national (place) development
How does the Special Issue contribute to current debates and research?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This Special Issue (SI) addresses important gaps in the extant sub-national (place) leadership, and specifically poses new questions that are related to the experiences and processes of sub-national (place) leadership in times of significant economic, social, environmental change, transition, and disruption. We discuss how we might better understand and explain sub-national (place making & shaping) experiences and processes in times of change, transition, and disruption. • The SI collection presents and debates the most recent and original research in the field of sub-national leadership where multi-level interrelated and intersecting challenges (across climate change and net zero energy transformations, health pandemics, the AI/digital economy and related technologies, human migration, changing trans-frontier labour markets, identity politics, increased political insecurity, and war and conflict) are creating a context for sub-national (place) leadership that is more fluid, more uncertain, and more unpredictable than in previous eras. • Consequently, this SI will advance city and regional leadership theory and concepts (as an important aspect of human relations in sub-national development), debates, and related research methodologies. It will extend the discussion(s) around the contribution of (formal and informal) place leaders, and the dynamics of (formal and informal) place leadership in a variety of new and different settings of city and regional development. • Papers will introduce new data and ‘models’, which will be theoretically well-grounded, methodologically rigorous, and they will make a strong and original contribution to related debates and discussions in the body of literature on contemporary city and regional development. Papers will address, for example, the following types of questions: What is changing in the world of sub-national leadership? How is it changing, and why? What are the implications of the changing and uncertain contexts and local circumstances for leadership in both local and transborder/transnational settings? What are leaders ‘doing’ in these changing contexts – and why? What difference is leadership (and leaders) making (if any?) – and how? How is sub-national leadership in

	<p>these settings being experienced by ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ (accepted and/or resisted or refused)? What does the new learning in papers mean for the theory/conceptualisation and enactment of sub-national leadership in local and transborder/transnational development settings? What are the next generation of sub-national (place) leadership and other agentic-oriented research questions that we might address as a priority?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Earlier work on place leadership has tended to focus on exploring the relationship between leadership and sub-national development processes and outcomes during relatively stable times (for example, by researching cases situated in the pre-Covid, pre-Brexit, pre-austerity era). This SI will focus on advancing our understanding(s) and explanation(s) of leadership in a different and more challenging changing, transitioning, and disrupted contemporary era across city & regional development.
<p>How does the Special Issue fit the aims of the journal?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SI will enhance the growing reputation of the Regional Studies community as expert in the field of sub-national leadership studies, and will build upon and extend important earlier contributions by RSA scholars working in the field of sub-national development (place) leadership (see, for example, Collinge, Gibney and Mabey, 2010; Sotarauta, Beer and Gibney, 2017; Sotarauta and Beer, 2021). • This collection of original and stimulating papers will introduce new ways of thinking about leadership in contemporary city and regional development across a variety of international settings and experiences (case study areas) from both within and beyond national borders. • We have invited papers from scholars who are research-active in the field of place leadership studies. The papers promise to be original and well-written, theoretically and conceptually strong, and methodologically innovative – as well as empirically and analytically rigorous. The papers will present, analyse, and discuss hitherto unpublished empirical data/case studies. • A community of scholars of international repute in the field of (place) leadership in sub-national development has been assembled to develop the papers for this SI.
<p>Is the Special Issue based around a conference or seminar? Please provide details.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The SI builds upon the publication outputs from earlier iterations of Regional Studies Association (RSA) funded international research networks on the topic of leadership in city and regional development (place leadership). • This current proposal for a co-edited and leadership themed SI has been developed in close consultation with several highly reputed RSA place leadership researchers. The SI proposal focuses on publishing the best research presented at an international research seminar, hosted in association with the RSA, that took place at Northumbria University in May 2023 on the topic of ‘leadership in transnational city & regional development’.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A 'Call for Abstracts' was also published via the RSA in early summer 2023 to encourage the submission of good quality international papers for this collection.
How will the range of contributions result in a strong collection?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The SI will bring together a highly contemporary and original collection of research papers from our RSA community of highly regarded and widely cited scholars in the field of city and regional leadership studies. Papers will explore leadership experiences and processes of leadership in sub-national settings experiencing change, transition, and disruption – and across sub-national economy, society, and environment. The cases and experiences addressed are from a wide and original variety of different types of places and settings within and across national borders (transborder/transnational spaces) from around the world. The SI will be co-edited by a team of four academics who have published widely on the topic of leadership in city and regional development. Collectively, the co-editing team have extensive experience of developing and delivering articles and SI co-edited collections, that have appeared in some of the most highly rated international journals with global (academic and policymaker) readership reach. The members of the editorial team are highly regarded and well-cited scholars in the fields of place leadership, agency in sub-national development, place making/shaping and related policy.

Guest Editor information	
Principal Guest Editor's name, affiliation, and email address	<p>Dr. John Gibney, Honorary Senior Fellow, Department of Management, The Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, UK.</p> <p>j.gibney@bham.ac.uk</p>
Co-Editor names, affiliations, and email addresses	<p>Professor John Shutt, The Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University; john.shutt@northumbria.ac.uk</p> <p>Professor Joyce Liddle, The Newcastle Business School, Northumbria University; joyce.liddle@northumbria.ac.uk</p> <p>Professor Markku Sotarauta, University of Tampere, Finland; markku.sotarauta@tuni.fi</p>

Leadership Conference at the University of Birmingham: Spring 2025

Further details will be available at the final conference in Birmingham University in Spring in 2025. Title of the conference:

‘Capability and capacity building in place leadership: identity, inclusion and change’.

The conference provides an opportunity for participants to present and discuss evidence-based examples of leadership at local, regional and national levels that cross and transcend borders. Key questions for discussion include: What do place-based identities mean? How have they changed in relation to local, regional and national dynamics? Where are the connections and contradictions between place-based identity and place-leadership? How can people be engaged for collective action to create change at a range of geographical levels? How is it possible to build confidence, capability and capacity in place? How can national and sub-national leadership best combine to support policy innovation in place? Which skills are key for place leaders to navigate the political and emotional challenges of place-based partnership working?