

Conference Call for Papers

RETHINKING THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF PLACE: CHALLENGES OF PRODUCTIVITY, INCLUSION AND POWER

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At the same time as economic inequalities between countries around the world seem on average to be diminishing somewhat in the last decades (mainly as a consequence of the relatively rapid economic growth in several select emerging economies), there has been a striking increase in inequalities within many countries since the 1980s (also Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society volume 4, issue 1: ‘The Persistence of Inequality?’). This trend has in recent years been further exacerbated by the Global Financial Crisis and ensuing Great Recession. This has prompted academics to take a renewed interest in inequality, exemplified by the publication of several highly influential books (specifically Piketty (2014), Stiglitz (2012), Milanovic (2016), and Wilkinson and Pickett (2009)). Such inequalities within countries have a clear spatial dimension, as income, wealth, human capital and economic power seem to be increasingly concentrated in certain places – especially a number of global cities – while many other places seem to be losing out (e.g. Martin et al. 2018). Persistent inequalities and their geographic manifestation, may moreover be an important factor in the surge of populism in various countries across the globe in recent years (e.g. Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Essletzbichler et al., 2018). Hence the impression is that the increase in inequality is implicated in some kind of ‘legitimation crisis’ (Habermas, 1973) of current modes of governance, which gives it additional relevance and urgency as a topic for policy as well as research.

In addition to deep-seated and increasing inequalities, lagging productivity growth has also become a key issue in many countries around the globe. Indeed the advancement of productivity has slowed down considerably over a period of 3 to 4 decades in many advanced economies, and has been exceptionally weak over the most recent 10 years (OECD, 2015). Also in many emerging and developing economies, labour productivity growth has levelled off (OECD, 2018). This slowdown in productivity growth is a major cause for concern, as increasing productivity is a key condition for engendering prosperity in the long run. The causes of this slowdown are as yet rather unclear – captured by the notion of ‘a productivity puzzle’. Various explanations have been put forward, such as problems in measurement of contemporary forms of value generation, shifts in the economic structure (with an increasing significance of services for which productivity improvement is more difficult), overregulation in product and labour markets, lack of investment in new capital and infrastructure, lagging development in human capital and skills, etc. What is however clear is that the development of productivity is highly uneven across several dimensions: between different countries and cities and regions within countries, between different sectors and different firms within sectors, and between different types of jobs and occupations. Hence the developments in productivity across economies, seems a major driver of the widening of economic inequalities. And conversely, the increase in inequalities may also be a factor in the lack of productivity growth. As it is possible that the growing income and wealth inequalities are linked to the increasing concentrations of corporate power and financial muscle

(conceivably brought about by such macro-level processes as ‘hyper-globalisation’, ‘financialisation’, the emergence of ‘platform capitalism’, etc.), which may act as impediments to economic dynamism and the investment in value-enhancing activities (rather than rent-seeking and value extraction).

In response to these rising concerns, Inclusive Growth has in recent years emerged as a concept and as an agenda which could offer a way forward, and which could potentially reconcile the two ambitions of lessening inequalities and improving productivity performance. Indeed, Inclusive Growth would require the broadening of “the productive base of the economy to generate strong and sustainable future productivity gains that everyone is empowered to contribute to, whilst also ensuring that productivity growth benefits all parts of society, in terms of improved living standards and opportunities”, as a recent OECD-report argues (OECD, 2018, p. 14). This seems pertinent in the context of developed countries (e.g. Benner and Pastor, 2012), but equally so in the context of emerging economies, which may be experiencing rapid economic advancement but in a highly uneven and potentially destabilising way (in fact, there has recently been a dismissal of the growth-equity trade-off by the IMF (e.g. Berg and Ostry, 2011; Ostry et al., 2014)). Nevertheless, despite an impressive amount of recent work, the definition, operationalisation, and implementation of Inclusive Growth remains unclear and fuzzy (Lee, 2018). Moreover, the evidence-base around Inclusive Growth is still weakly developed, including questions around how spatial-economic processes could contribute to or interfere with Inclusive Growth (e.g. Trullén and Galletto, 2018), what policy measures would be effective, and at which spatial scale interventions should be formulated and implemented (also Turok, 2010).

This shifting landscape of (re-)emerging concerns and concepts in economic politics in places around the world, calls for a rethinking of the political economy of place. This special issue welcomes papers that shed new light on the challenges of productivity and inclusion, faced by many cities, regions, nations and supranational institutions. In particular, we invite papers that set these challenges in a broader context. Relating these challenges to the implicit and explicit power structures and processes, prevailing at various scales within contemporary capitalism. And linking these issues to a range of other concerns, such as the transition to more sustainable forms development, the weakening of representative democracy, engaging with ‘superdiverse’ populations, etc. Contributions can comprise conceptual discussions or empirical articles employing qualitative as well as quantitative methodologies; and may be set within a range of geographical contexts. Possible themes may include (but are not confined to):

- Developments in income and wealth inequalities linked to patterns of uneven productivity growth, especially across the spatial economy. And how such patterns interact with - and are perhaps reinforced by - other types of inequalities and structural factors, such as political (dis)enfranchisement, access to networks and resources, forms of security and precarity, status and identity, and other types of in- or exclusion.
- The larger-scale processes, structures and policies potentially driving increasing inequalities and greater differences in productivity, such as ‘hyperglobalisation’, financialisation, new forms of exploitation and extraction, structural transformations in the economy, developments in artificial intelligence and robotics, ‘premature deindustrialisation’, etc.

- Connecting the challenges of rising economic inequalities and the ‘productivity puzzle’ to other pressing issues, such as climate change and environmental degradation, the rise of populism and authoritarianism, increasing concentrations of unaccountable corporate power in finance, ‘big tech’, and media, etc.
- Specifying the policy agenda of dealing with the twin challenges of combatting inequalities and improving productivity, and identifying the trade-offs and hard choices this may entail in terms of politics (including case studies of places which may be considered examples of success or failure).
- Substantiating, operationalising and ‘spatialising’ the Inclusive Growth concept and agenda. Perhaps it may be fruitful here to connect Inclusive Growth more explicitly to the literature on normative political and social theory, such as notions of citizenship; capabilities; Social, Spatial and Environmental Justice; the Just City, the Foundational Economy, etc.

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Speakers interested in presenting a paper at the Conference, or Authors interested in publishing in the forthcoming Special Issue of *CJRES* devoted to this subject, should submit an Abstract of about 400 words to Francis Knights fk240@cam.ac.uk by 1 May 2019, and full Papers will need to be received by 1 September 2019. Submissions will be subject to the journal's normal peer review process. Details of *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* publication process, evaluation criteria and style are available on the Journal's website <https://academic.oup.com/cjres>