BAM 2025 CONFERENCE

Kent Business School

Innovation Track

Track Chairs:

- Dr Nick Marshall, University of Brighton
- Dr George Tsekouras, University of Greenwich

Linking to the wider theme of the conference, we warmly invite papers that consider the role of borders in innovation. As with the overall conference theme, we adopt a broad conception of borders, which can take many forms (geographical, historical, political, physical, social, organisational, cultural, psychological, technological), interact in complex and often unpredictable ways, and have both negative and positive impacts and outcomes. Borders are often thought of as limiting and excluding, but they can also be places of movement and interaction, where opportunities can arise. As such, borders are a useful metaphor to think about innovation, and closely connect with related concepts, such as boundaries, barriers, and frontiers, that are often invoked in the innovation literature. Using the list of different types of borders above, the following are some reflections on how they are relevant to the study of innovation, some of which have received extensive attention, while others arguably deserve to be explored much more than they have. These are by no means comprehensive and are just intended to provide some thoughts, questions, and inspirations to promote what we hope will be interesting and productive discussions during the conference.

- Geographical: Although often implicit, there has always been a geographical dimension built into the study of innovation. From the earliest contributions, the political economy of innovation focused on the national and regional conditions that contributed to waves of social and technological change. It has since tracked the shifting spatial centres of gravity from what have been categorised as the first to fourth industrial revolutions. Connected with this has been an interest in the patterning of innovation, at different scales from the local to the global, and issues about uneven development and how to address spatial inequalities.

- Historical: As a process, innovation is necessarily temporal, and there have been many attempts to characterise it in terms of a number of stages of activity, from ideation through to ultimately generating and capturing some sort of value. In this sense, innovation entails a series of border crossings as efforts are made to cross one activity boundary to another, although not necessarily in a linear fashion. There has also been extensive interest in the part that innovation plays in the historical development of economies and societies. A key debate here is about whether there are finite limits to growth and the double-edged nature of innovation as both problem and potential solution to the challenge of sustainable growth.

- Political: The character of geographical borders and the territories they help to define are politically influenced. While they are often taken-for-granted, especially when they have been established for a long time, recent geopolitical conflicts have highlighted their potential fragility. Even without military conflict, political borders can be highly contested, as is clear from the intense and polarised debates about immigration and more broadly, issues about the movement of people, goods and services, capital, and ideas. The relationship between movement and innovation is important and raises questions, for example, about the role of displacement, enforced or otherwise, on the stimulation of innovation and entrepreneurship, often by necessity. Under more stable conditions, political borders become spaces where innovation systems emerge and governments attempt different approaches to promoting innovation through public policy. However, they can also become barriers to addressing global grand challenges, such as climate change, where issues cannot be resolved by individual states alone.

- Physical: In many respects, ongoing digital transformation has broken down physical barriers, allowing ever greater access to information, easier and richer virtual interactions, and even the potential to transcend the boundaries of what it means to be human through artificial intelligence and related technologies. These developments have opened up the possibility for innovations across a wide range of other sectors and activities. However, they are not without their challenges and limitations, and their implications can be both positive and negative, in some instances raising difficult ethical issues. Also, the digital transformation does not mean that everything melts into thin air. The virtual is dependent on an extensive, and energy intensive, collection of physical infrastructures and technologies, and is also helping to drive an every growing movement of goods and materials around the world. Largely forgotten when they work, these informational and logistical infrastructures are potential fragile and bring the physical substrate of the digital economy to the fore when disrupted.

- Social: The social nature of innovation has long been acknowledged, with a lot of work on the importance of networks and connectivity for innovation, countering the popular image of the lone inventor as the primary source of innovations. The structure and texture of social networks is important, raising issues about the social construction of borders and boundaries and how these shape interactions. There are important questions here about the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion and their effects on innovation. There are some who argue that innovation has become more democratised. However, there is still much unevenness in terms of those involved in the innovation process and especially in the distribution of costs and benefits. There is also arguably room for more explicit consideration of the social patterning of innovation according to different social characteristics and identities, such as gender, race, age, and disability.

- Organisational: Although individual organisations are often the primary unit of analysis, what happens inside and outside organisational borders has long been an area of interest for innovation studies. This is clearly captured in debates about open innovation, absorptive capacity, knowledge integration, and innovation ecosystems. However, there is still much to be explored about the dynamics, benefits, and disadvantages of organisational openness/closedness in the innovation process. There are also issues about the concentration of organisational power, the leading examples being a handful of technology companies that have high levels of influence, directly and indirectly, within and across international borders.

- Cultural: Innovation studies has long been interested in how boundaries of culture, knowledge, and practice are spanned, and the potential for creativity that emerges from cross-cultural interaction. The borderlands between cultures, whether national, social, organisational, professional, etc., can provide fertile ground for sparking new ideas from the confrontation between differences. However, this can be a challenging process to manage and there is still scope to develop a more nuanced and contingent approach to the relationship between different

types of cultural interaction and the varying activities and stages involved in taking innovations from idea to reality. This includes considering how different bases of identity coexist to offer a more intersectional understanding of the interplay between culture and innovation.

- Psychological: Innovation involves crossing a critical and difficult border between the imagined and the real. This is challenging in view of the individual and social psychological processes, including powerful biases and heuristics, that lead us in the direction of the familiar and the routine. This has been extensively studied in the literature on how innovation opportunities are identified and addressed. There are also questions about how psychological boundaries can both enable and constrain the creative process, and how and when the problem and solution spaces needs to be extended or limited.

- Technological: Although innovation comes in many forms, it is frequently presented in terms of breaking barriers and pushing forward technological frontiers. This has certainly been the case, with breakthroughs and disruptive changes across a range of technologies that shift the border of what is possible. However, it is also important to remember the smaller incremental changes that influence both the production and consumption of innovations. The former have been extensively studied through the concept of continuous improvement. Arguably less attention has been paid to the incrementally changing experience of innovations by customers and users. A bit like looking back at old photographs, as users of innovation we are often unaware of change until time has passed and we have the benefit of hindsight. The their effects and implications are difficult to judge until much later, raising important questions about the wider assessment and evaluation of the innovation process.

As always, we take as inclusive an approach as possible, recognising that there are multiple perspectives on the potential benefits and problems of innovation, and that it is important to create opportunities for a genuine dialogue between them, so that we are continually subjecting the core assumptions of innovation studies to critical reflection, and opening up the possibility for renewal where needed. We invite papers from all perspectives, including those that are optimistic about the capacity of innovation to effect positive transformation, as well as those that are more sceptical or critical. We welcome contributions across the range of innovation types and activities, from the technological to the organisational, as well as those driven by different value frameworks, not only economic, but also political, social, and environmental. We also encourage studies focusing on a range of geographical locations and scales. Papers may be empirical or theoretical and a range of methodological approaches are encouraged. Possible and by no means restrictive themes are as follows:

- The socio-economic shaping of innovation
- The implications of innovation for social and economic development and the generation and distribution of wealth and wellbeing
- Innovation in the digital economy and the post-COVID organisation
- Generative artificial intelligence and other potentially disruptive innovations
- The challenges and opportunities of the fourth industrial revolution
- Innovation in high-tech or high-growth industries and (large or small) firms
- Innovation in low- or medium-tech sectors and (large or small) firms
- Innovation in services, knowledge intensive services and creative industries
- Open Innovation in both large and small firms
- Social innovation and innovation in social enterprises and other not-for-profit organisations
- Innovation and entrepreneurship: management practices and policy challenges
- User-led and community-based innovation and crowdsourcing and crowdfunding activities
- Eco-innovation and the environmental challenge
- Intra- and inter-organisational networks and collaborative innovation
- University-industry links and innovation
- The role of groups and peer-to-peer interaction in innovation
- Innovation in Strategic Alliances and Joint Ventures
- ‘Illegal’ innovation such as cyber-crime and hacker innovations
- Practice-based theories of innovation, knowledge, and learning

- Innovation, dynamic capabilities and routines
- National and regional innovation systems
- Policy experimentation and accountability – false failures and false successes
- Innovation metrics and indicators
- Innovation in newly emerging and developing economies