

Geographies of growth: innovations, networks and collaborations

**Karlsson, C., Andersson, M. and Bjerke, L. (Eds). Cheltenham Edward Elgar publishing (2017)
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In recent years, interest in regional studies has been on the rise, as regions are becoming centres for knowledge transition and innovation. Recent contributions call regions “power houses” for economic growth (Karlsson, Andersson and Bjerke, 2017, p. 2). On the other hand, as the editors stress, many regions struggle with “increasing problems with decreasing labour demand, increasing unemployment, lower purchasing power, a shrinking tax base, an ageing population and a loss of many private and public services” (p. 2).

The book *Geographies of Growth: Innovations, Networks and Collaborations* presents contributions to the 17th Uddevalla Symposium on “Geography of Growth: the Frequency, Nature and Consequences of Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Regions of Varying Density” in Sweden (12-14 June 2014). The publication forms part of the New Horizons in Regional Science series, which has already issued more than 50 books.

The first part of the book discusses how regions can initiate structural changes to foster economic growth. Chapter 2, by Nyström and Ros, study regional variations in the re-employment of the workforce after business closure. In Chapter 3, Arvermo (Sweden) and Gräsjö (Sweden) study how border regions could attract a highly educated workforce and stress that cross-border accessibility to human capital influences productivity on both sides of the border. Cornett, in Chapter 4, examines these structural changes that accompany weakening, as well as rapidly growing, regions in Europe. He suggests strengthening innovation as a move towards supporting

disfavoured regions. Finally, Naveed thematises the problem of structural change throughout the European Union. These changes explain the disparities in countries, regions and industries.

The second part, *Geography of Entrepreneurship and Business Dynamics*, focuses on different aspects of entrepreneurship as a driving force of regional growth and speaks about the geography of entrepreneurship. Fredin and Jogmark compare the informal institutions and the social acceptance of entrepreneurship of two Swedish towns: Linköping and Norrköping. Parajuli and Haynes build on US data and prove that access to broadband internet fosters the establishment of new firms and opens new possibilities for development.

In the next chapter, Jienwatcharamongkhol and Tavassoli study personal characteristics of founders of companies, such as age, gender and education and their importance for entrepreneurial success. They conclude that external factors have a lesser impact on the survival of firms. In Chapter 9, Schutjens, de Vries and Risselada examine differences between immigrant and native entrepreneurs and point to different rates of firm survival. The last chapter in the second part, by Stone, analyses the evolution of Swedish trade, its integration into world economy and the emergence of industry specialisation.

The book's part three, *Geography of Innovations, Cooperation and Growth*, analyses the role of innovation, cooperation and knowledge resources in economic growth. Warda and Johansson discuss the value of knowledge for economic success. The more knowledge a firm absorbs, the more it will export. Chapter 12, by Hjaltadóttir, Makkonen and Sørensen, debates partner selection processes

in cross-border innovation cooperation.

Chapter 13, by Alfken, studies the geography of creativity by combining aspects of economics and psychology. Although the chapter does not deliver any answers, instead posing more questions, the idea of the effect of creative individuals on regional economics sparks further ideas.

The last part of the book, *University Spin-offs: Barriers and Challenges*, consists of just one chapter by Goldstein, Peer and Sedlacek. Education and research activities may spark regional growth, but active spin-offs, which commercialise knowledge and technology and trigger the

development of an innovation ecosystem. Based on a data set from Vienna, the authors study barriers to spin-off generation, such as lack of business and entrepreneurial skills and lack of awareness among university researchers for the commercialisation potential of their discoveries.

The book is an interesting collection of regional studies. However, it raises an important question: Can these findings be informative for other regions outside the Scandinavian or mid-European environment? The strength of the book, the collection of contributions to one dedicated event towards furthering knowledge

regarding regional economic growth, is also its greatest weakness. Individual chapters are very insightful, but the compendium lacks coherence. The book does not provide recommendations or advice for, for instance, policymakers. Nevertheless, the different sections offer connection points to regional studies by many different disciplines and thereby provide interesting ideas for its readership.

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