

Reviews / Comptes rendus

Handbook on the Geographies of Innovation

Edited by Richard Shearmur, Christophe Carrincazeaux, and David Doloreux, Edward Elgar Publishing, Northampton, MA, 2016, 512 pp., cloth \$340.99 (ISBN 978-784710767)

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It is rare to find contemporary economic development prescriptions that do not centre innovation as an integral component to local and regional prosperity. The term is popularly used in a wide variety of contexts: from the entrepreneur, to the firm seeking new products and solutions, to federal policies in support of innovation. In the *Handbook on the Geographies of Innovation*, editors Richard Shearmur, Christophe Carrincazeaux, and David Doloreux define innovation as “processes that ultimately lead to new industry formation or to existing firms introducing new products, processes, and services” (p. 14). It is this definition that guides the selection of the 27 chapters included in this book. The chapters are split into seven thematically organized sections, including a range of topics such as introductory theories, varieties in scale (from local to transnational), policies and their impacts, and alternative takes on classical underpinnings of innovation.

The editors introduce the book with a description of two inherent problems in any study of the geographies of innovation. The first problem is the assumption a researcher makes in the attempt to locate and measure the occurrence of innovation. For example, questions of scale, regional context, and classification categories all fluctuate, and these shifts affect outcomes of a study. The second problem considers the contextual biases the researcher brings to the study of innovation and how these biases obscure an objective approach to theory formation. In the next section of the introduction, the editors list six confusions that pervade studies on the geography of innovation. Rather than the subsequent presentation of chapters, the editors provide a summary overview at the start of each

section. This is indeed helpful in guiding the reader and making the book accessible as a piecemeal reference guide rather than a book read sequentially from start to finish.

The *Handbook* comes at a necessary time to revisit geographies of innovation under globalization, advanced neoliberal regimes, and sophistications in information communication technologies that facilitate worker mobility and the permeability of the firm—realities hardly prevalent in the 1980s when studies on innovation became widespread. As such, it is well positioned to interrogate and provide a much-needed update to overly cited scholarship on agglomeration theories and proximate spillovers, as well as to add nuance to prior conceptions on the role of place. This *Handbook* brings to the discipline fresh perspectives on connections between regions and ephemera within time and space that become viable streams to study wider varieties of innovation.

Drawn by Shearmur’s earlier work on innovation, amongst the chapters I was hoping to find more studies on the flexible worker, the gig/platform economy, and implications of work performed outside of firm boundaries. Unfortunately, these topics are not well covered. In addition, I expected a discussion on the way various scholars, organizations, practitioners, and the media define innovation. Innovation, as Benoit Godin (2015) delineates in his deconstruction of the term, is a fraught concept. Today, innovators are embraced, governments instrumentalize innovation to generate policy guidance, and scholars rigorously study inputs of innovation; however, historically, innovation was seen as pejorative with the innovator rejected by the populace. It is within this context that I would have liked to see engagement on the politics behind the term, what its definition means in relation to value and wealth, and how the concept is operated on by practitioners in pursuit of regional advantage. Also missing—to the full admission of the editors—are perspectives that move beyond an already inflated repertoire of work completed by scholars of the Global North on issues of the Global North.

Due to a decades-long history in economic geography of numerous scholars contributing theories on the anchoring and concentration of innovation activity, an individual not versed in this body of work will find it difficult to follow the text. A basic vocabulary on, for example, agglomeration advantages of knowledge spillovers, spatial propinquity, informal and cross-sector networks, and industry life cycles are prerequisites for this book. However, for the scholar versed in the language looking for more recent studies on innovation and a more robust set of empirical examples, this book serves as an excellent

“handbook”—as demonstrated by its permanent position beside my desktop.

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References

Godin, B. 2015. *Innovation contested: The idea of innovation over the centuries*. New York, NY: Routledge.