

Book Review

Proximity, Distance and Diversity: Issues on Economic and Local Development. Edited by Arnoud Lagendijk and Päivi Oinas. Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005.

This book contains a collection of papers that were presented at a conference that was organized jointly by the International Geographical Union (IGU) Commission on the Dynamics of Economic Spaces and the IGU Study Group of Local Development in Turin (2001). That conference highlighted the emerging debate on the role of proximity in spatial economic development. Starting in the early 1980s, a vast and varied body of work on local-regional economic development, clusters, industrial districts, and systems of innovation focused on the role of proximity, local linkages, and local embeddedness for innovation, competitiveness, and growth. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, such work attracted increasing criticism from academics, who pointed out the importance of extra-local relations for the competitiveness of firms and regions. One of the aims of the conference was to shed light on the issue of proximity, especially the relative significance of local versus extra-local relations for local-regional development. Theoretical papers presented at the conference were published in a special issue of *Geografiska Annaler* (2002, Vol. 84B). This book contains the more empirical contributions.

The book joins a growing body of edited volumes and special issues in academic journals on regional development, clustering, industrial districts, and associated issues. However, this collection is distinctive in one important respect: it focuses on relations and linkages. As such, the material is strongly related to the articles that appeared in the same year in a special issue of *Regional Studies* (2005, Vol. 39 No. 1). One of the dangers of such a focus is that the reader loses sight of the role of other mechanisms

and advantages of spatial concentration, notably those related to the (local) labor market.

The list of contributors is dominated by geographers and includes a small number of academics in related fields as well as policy makers. The 14 short empirical articles (approximately 9,000 words) invariably report the results of qualitative research, which makes the book accessible to less quantitatively inclined social scientists. All the articles deal, to some extent, with the significance of proximate relations. They are, however, varied, reporting on studies on different types of regions (developed and emerging, core and peripheral regions—including Vancouver, Canada; Lower Galilee, Israel; Zhejiang, China; and Sheffield, U.K.) and different sectors (from traditional to high technology—including the sock and stocking, automotive, biotechnology, and “cultural” sectors). What is important is that they also vary in their focus on nonlocal relations. The editors structure the contributions in three parts. The first part includes articles that emphasize local linkages and the regional scale. The second part focuses on external linkages, and the third part contains articles that are informative regarding the meaning of different spatial scales. The value of the structure is limited, however, since there is considerable overlap among the articles in the various sections, and many articles would fit comfortably in more than one section.

Space does not allow a critical appraisal of the individual case studies. Some of the articles are interesting and compelling, while others lack the necessary depth and are, accordingly, less convincing. Some of the studies do not go much further than providing support for the existence of nonlocal relations without much analysis of their relative importance and strategic role.

The editors significantly augmented the value of the book by adding an excellent introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, they set the stage for the debate by reviewing the key strands of the literature on localization and regionalization. Starting with the original contributions of Alfred Marshall and the postwar discussion of the relevance of the advantages of localization versus urbanization, three additional phases are covered: the interest in the spatial organization of corporate hierarchies in the 1970s, the period of new regionalism, and the present conceptualizations of nodes in dispersed economic systems. The latter period presents several ways out of the regionalization-localization trap. Two of these ways are suggested as providing promising leads to “move beyond the local,” namely, the scalar and (international) network perspectives. The review introduces a second, related, debate about the usefulness of the distinction between the advantages of localization and urbanization. The authors suggest that the way out of this debate requires a reconceptualization that builds on the notions of specialization and diversity—the third central concept included in the book’s title.

These ideas are subsequently developed in the concluding chapter, which partly builds on and partly reinterprets the material presented in the empirical studies. The authors work toward a conceptual framework that helps the reader to relate to, and make sense of, the range and variety of effective forms of regional economic development that are presented in the empirical

studies and elsewhere. These empirical realities involve various combinations of proximity and distance and specialization and diversity. The significance of these combinations is seen to depend on the role of economic agents or regions in broader economic systems. The authors propose that this role can be characterized along two dimensions: the strength of innovative capability and the maturity of a business. They then propose a helpful typology of nine types of economic agents that allows for more nuanced hypotheses regarding the significance of local and nonlocal relationships and the role of diversity in a variety of situations. The value of the typology is subsequently tested by positioning the case studies within it. As could be expected, the result of the test is sometimes inconclusive, mainly because most of the case studies do not specifically focus on all the analytical categories proposed by the editors.

The book provides a useful bundle of case studies from which students and researchers will probably select those that are most relevant to their particular region, sector, and/or approach. The greatest value of the book probably lies in the contributions of the editors. The conceptualization and typology provide great starting points for research on the relative importance of local-nonlocal linkages. These contributions can easily be read independently from the case studies. In fact, the distinction between specialization and diversity hardly figures in most of the case studies.

Chris van Egeraat

National University of Ireland, Maynooth