

The Region in the New Economy

An international perspective
on regional dynamics
in the 21st century

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Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
131 Main Street
Burlington, VT 05401-5600 USA

Ashgate website: <http://www.ashgate.com>

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

The region in the new economy : an international

perspective on regional dynamics in the 21st century

1. Regional economics 2. Space in economics 3. Technological
innovations

I. Higano, Yoshiro

338.9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2002101558

ISBN 0 7546 1983 4

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

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Preface

Regions are like sailing ships on the ocean. They benefit from a fresh breeze, but they may also face heavy storms. Their external environment is never stable, but offers an ever-changing scene of opportunities and problems. The impact of new developments can often only be ascertained much later, with the benefit of hindsight.

The advent of the so-called New Economy offers such an uncertain change in regions and cities. Some authors claim that the new virtual network economy driven by information and communication technology will offer new promising perspectives for all regions and cities of our world. From this perspective, the 'death of distance' will create a level playing field for all actors, so that less favoured regions will cease to continue their dismal existence. Others, however, argue that the New Economy will in fact replicate the existing patterns of discrepancies in regional and urban development, as the access to the new knowledge infrastructure is unequally distributed.

The 'tyranny of distance' may even aggravate existing welfare differences. It is clear that we enter here a complex force field in which international driving forces, industrial developments, sustainability policies, infrastructure planning and knowledge management become closely intertwined phenomena.

Unfortunately, there are no (semi-)controlled laboratory experiments to test out the above mentioned expectations on regional and urban development. At best, we can rely on previous experiences and plausible expectations. In January 2000 a group of regional scientists met in the city of Port Elizabeth (South Africa) to discuss a wide array of new scientific challenges in the area of regional and urban development. They enjoyed great hospitality at the Port Elizabeth Technikon. Their aim was to explore new research avenues for regional science in the era of the New Economy, against the background of far reaching global changes. The new political constellation in South Africa provided an excellent frame of reference for new perspectives and reflections. It was in particular Professor Hirotada Kohno, at the time president of the Regional Science Association International, who took leadership in organizing this scientific event. This book may serve as an 'homage' to him for his timely initiative.

Finally, we would like to thank all contributors for their collaboration in the review and revision process, and Tineke Poot for patiently and carefully preparing the camera-ready copy.

Yoshiro Higano, Peter Nijkamp, Jacques Poot and Kobus van Wyk

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