

AN INTRODUCTION TO ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY GLOBALIZATION, UNEVEN DEVELOPMENT AND PLACE

**DANNY MACKINNON & ANDREW CUMBERS** 





# An Introduction to Economic Geography

Globalization, Uneven Development and Place

Danny Mackinnon and Andrew Cumbers



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#### First published 2007

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ISBN 978-0-13-129316-8

#### **British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 10 09 08 07

Typeset in 9.75pt Minion by 3

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Ashford Colour Press, Hampshire

The publisher's policy is to use paper manufactured from sustainable forests.

### Preface

Economic geography has become a highly diverse and open field of research in recent years, incorporating a wide range of research topics, theories and methodologies. The influence of the so-called cultural and institutional 'turns' in particular has enlivened the subject, exposing it to new ideas and concerns (Thrift, 2000). New areas of interest such as consumption, corporate cultures and gender relations in the workplace have been embraced by economic geographers, alongside work on more 'traditional' topics such as regional development, large firms and labour markets, often informed by new perspectives. As a result, the notion of the economy as a self-evident and self-contained entity as been destabilized, leading to an extension of its boundaries and the forging of new linkages with a range of other subject areas. The profusion of approaches and methodologies means that there is no single approach or 'paradigm' that dominates the field. Such diversity and pluralism has generated considerable excitement and vitality among researchers and students. At the same time, however, it has raised concerns about the coherence, identity and purpose of economic geography (see Antipode, 2001). One of the major challenges is that of how to communicate the diversity of the subject to the relatively uninitiated, particularly economic geography students, many of whom may expect to be introduced to a single 'right' approach or a clear set of core concerns (Barnes, 2006).

Our purpose in writing this textbook is to convey some of the diversity and vitality of contemporary economic geography to students. It is intended to work as an introductory text for undergraduate geography students taking courses in economic geography at the equivalent of Levels 1 and 2 in England and Wales (Levels 2 and 3 in Scotland). Our decision to write this book was prompted by the apparent lack of an intro-

ductory general textbook for British students, certainly when compared to other areas of human geography, such as political geography, 'concepts/approaches' or 'methods', which seem to have witnessed a profusion of textbooks in recent years. Three main types of existing texts in economic geography can be identified, alongside chapters in introductory human geography collections such as Cloke et al. (2005) and Daniels et al. (2005) and more specialized books on particular topics (e.g. consumption or labour markets). First, there are those that focus on a core theme such as globalization, of which Dicken (2003a) and Knox et al. (2003) are the established favourites. Second, a number of edited collections in the form of readers or companions presenting overviews of key topics or selections of 'classic' papers have been published in recent years (Barnes and Sheppard, 2000; Barnes et al., 2004; Bryson et al., 1999). Third, more advanced research-level texts such as Hudson (2005) are also available. This book aims to provide a text that is more accessible and student-friendly than the second or third of these types while incorporating a broader range of topics than the first. It is designed to guide students through key debates and issues in an integrated fashion.

Three main theoretical approaches can be identified within contemporary economic geography: spatial analysis, political economy and cultural economy (Chapter 2). As Hudson (2005, p.15) argues, the latter two should be seen as potentially complementary rather than alternative approaches, providing different 'analytic windows' from which to view the economy. While the book is underpinned by our favoured political economy approach, we have sought to connect this to some of the cultural and institutional insights that have informed research in recent years. Rather than having 'a 1970s/1980s feel' about it — as one

reviewer commented on the original book proposal—the 'new' or revised form of political economy that we have adopted has moved beyond the rather clunky and deterministic nature of earlier versions to become more flexible and open to the importance of context, difference and identity (Peck, 2005, p.166). To adopt Hudson's terms, our approach can be described as 'culturally sensitive political economy' rather than a 'politically sensitive cultural economy' (Hudson, 2005, p.15).

This book is underpinned by three main thematic concerns, highlighted in the subtitle: globalization, uneven development and place. Globalization is one of the key forces reshaping the geography of economic activity, driven by multinational corporations, financial institutions, international economic organizations and governments. It has sparked a wave of protests from 'anti-globalization' activists and groups since the late 1990s. In many ways, globalization provides a key contemporary vehicle for examining the longer-standing concerns of economic geography, many of which can be related to the overarching concepts of uneven development and place. We view uneven development as an inherent characteristic of the capitalist economy, reflecting the tendency for growth and prosperity to be geographically concentrated in particular locations (Smith, 1984). The theme of place, in turn, reflects geographers' traditional interest in distinctive localities. Crucially, however, such local distinctiveness must be seen as the product of interaction with wider economic processes, not isolation. In this sense, one of the main geographical effects of globalization is the forging of

closer linkages between the economies of distant countries and regions.

In selecting the topics and issues covered in the book, we have tried to reflect contemporary concerns in economic geography. Relatively 'new' areas (to economic geographers), such as consumption, services and the cultural industries, are incorporated alongside more 'traditional' ones such as regional development, agglomeration and labour. The book is global in terms of its geographical range and scope, and we have tried to include research and case studies drawn from a range of countries and regions. Economic development in the 'global South' is the subject of a discrete chapter, and the connections between developed and developing countries are highlighted throughout the book. Such is the breadth and diversity of the subject, however, that significant omissions are inevitable. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the set of relations between the economy and the environment (see Hudson, 2005, pp.38-56), though individual readers will identify others (transition economies receive little direct attention, for instance). In general terms, the outlook and scope of the book are inevitably limited by our UK residence, reliance on English-language materials and immersion in the concerns of Anglo-American human geography. More specifically, our personal research interests in areas such as regional development, labour markets and state restructuring in developed economies have probably exerted some (indeterminate) influence over the selection of topics and approach.

Please note that bold text indicates an entry in the Glossary.

### Acknowledgements

The idea for the book emerged from a discussion between Andrew Taylor of Pearson Education and one of the authors. Andrew has subsequently been the editor responsible for the book and we are grateful to him, Sarah Busby and the rest of the team at Pearson for their assistance and patience. Most of the figures in the book were drawn by the production team at Pearson while Alison Sandison and Jenny Johnston at Aberdeen provided more specialist cartographic support. We would also like to thank the various reviewers of both the original proposal and, especially, the draft chapters, particularly the three reviewers of the entire text — Professor Peter Daniels at

Birmingham, Dr Michael Punch at University College Dublin and Dr Pete North at Liverpool. We have tried to incorporate their suggestions wherever possible and the book is undoubtedly much better as a result. Special thanks are due also to Keith Chapman, for the support and encouragement he has provided to both of us in our careers, and to close colleagues in the Geography Departments at Aberdeen and Glasgow, for general camaraderie. Andy would also like to acknowledge the help and advice of Ray Hudson from PhD days onwards, and lastly give a big thanks to Fran and Anna for their continuing support, tolerance and love.

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