

Knowledge, space, economy

Bryson, J. R., Daniels, P. W., Henry, N. & Pollard, J. (eds)
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That there has been some kind of general socio-economic shift into a 'knowledge society' seems to have become a recent truism, although there is a great deal of debate as to what the appearance, the dynamics and indeed the geography of such a social order might be. It is to these questions that *Knowledge, space, economy* turns, so as to develop a conceptual framework and multi-disciplinary perception of the key issues academics face in coming to terms with the inter-related technical, organisational, social and economic changes. The editors of the collection are explicitly aware of the pitfalls of being early movers in any apparently novel/ emergent academic field, and it is to their credit that *in toto*, the book has an immediate gravitas which should see the book as the bedrock of a new corpus.

Besides the brief opening and closing remarks of the editors that frame the individual contributions, the book is in three parts. The first section seeks to conceptualise ideas of knowledge and their socio-spatial manifestation from a plurality of disciplinary perspectives. Here the book seeks to embed itself as an interdisciplinary work, something certainly achieved. Although the balance of the book lies towards more cultural and sociological approaches, Howells takes a radically different approach in beginning with the material practices of firms, and how their changing knowledge requirements have produced new and distinct geographies. This approach contrasts very strongly with other contributions. Jessop, for example, begins from a much more structural perspective, linking changes in the nature of state governance regimes to the changes in social relations necessary to ensure the continued circulation and valourisation of knowledge capital.

The second section's ostensible purpose is to "draw from and to illustrate many of the issues examined in Part I" (p. 7), but on reflection, there was perhaps something more of a disjuncture between the theoretical analyses and the detailed descriptive/ analytic material than I expected. Nevertheless, the editors must be commended for assembling such a diverse and simultaneously engaging set of case studies, in which theoretical knowledge frameworks are successfully deployed to draw genuine insights from empirical material. The six studies all draw on very interesting, diverse, and unusually, relevant and accessible empirical information. This provides the reader with immediate empathy for, and access to, the more theoretical arguments. The scope of the material ranges from changes in the UK retail banking sector (and their geographical implications) to the role of the (US-based) Heritage Foundation in propagating the US geopolitical hegemon *via* a strikingly neat history of management consultancy. By using extensively researched subject areas with considerable vernacular profile, part two demonstrates the extensive utility offered by the varieties of what could be regarded as 'the knowledge approach'.

Although the editors have sought to separate out the third section, there are undoubtedly close links between it and the previous section. In particular, Cooke *et al.*, looking at knowledge circuits and producer-consumer linkages in the food industry, raise similar issues to Henry and Pinch, writing about Motor Sport Valley. Both Henry and Pinch, and Pollard and Leyshon deploy innovative graphical

techniques to demonstrate sequences of knowledge evolution (motor sport and retail geography respectively) which I found a useful means of interpreting their narratives. Similarly, both Webster and Bell have contributed chapters that raise questions about who the ultimate beneficiaries of the creation and circulation of knowledge are, and how the appropriation and socialisation of knowledges create new forms of control (in financial and genetic benchmarking respectively). Both have resonances with Sidaway and Pryke, who look at the meaning of the knowledge of freedom as a facilitator of global financial transactions and the promotion of particular geo-economic interests.

Each of the chapters throughout the book fulfil their respective purposes admirably. Part one offering a set of complementary theoretical reviews of ideas of knowledge, and parts two and three a set of examples of global/ knowledge geographies. Each of the chapters is remarkably free-standing, of exceptional academic quality in their own right, and for that reason the book deserves to be a great success; as readers are reminded by Adam Tickell on the back cover, "this book brings together some of the most interesting authors working in the field of the 'geography of knowledge' ". It certainly has brought them together, but I am not certain that all the opportunities offered by a collection of such esteemed writers have been fully exploited.

The reason I say this is because when I later re-read part one (having completed the book), I felt that some of the more theoretical points suddenly became a great deal clearer in the context of the concrete examples presented in the later sections. To illustrate this, Odih and Knights make the rather abstract point that "to emulate the apparent success and prestige of scientific practices, marketing phenomena within the social world must be amenable to causal analysis" (p. 83).

However, this rather technical observation becomes a great deal more meaningful in the context of (*inter alia*) Bryson's chapter. Bryson provides a lengthy analysis of how management consultants have built their expertise and knowledge from which they derive their legitimacy. Bryson argues that the scientific/ causal methodology is an integral part of that, through "the MBA, the business school, managerial publishing and consulting" (p. 162). The reader at once has a more intuitive understanding of the theoretical argument, whilst the argument informs and deepens understandings of the particular case study.

Thus, if I had a single criticism to make of this book, it would be that the editors have made light of the linkages between the chapters, and indeed the arrangement of the book militates against the reader spontaneously generating those connections. The chapters are remarkably self-contained — that is a huge strength for certain readerships, in particular for undergraduates who might wish to read a limited number of the contributions. However, the book is very difficult to read as a single narrative, with five very heavily theoretical chapters before any more tangible analysis takes place, analysis which, as I have already argued, adds a great deal to those theoretical discussions.

Given that this book seeks to lay a foundation for the incorporation of ideas of knowledge into the geographical academy, there is a huge amount of material upon which such a basis will undoubtedly be built. In its entirety, it is a technically-demanding work (a fact belied by its modish production values), yet the constituent chapters are themselves remarkably accessible and rigorous. *Knowledge, space,*

economy is a book worthy of serious reflection from those seeking to derive from it the significant cross-disciplinary insight to which the editors have both aspired and effectively delivered.

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