Special issue on innovation and ecology: regional science perspectives on spatial systems

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Regional science is the multidisciplinary study of spatial patterns of social, economic and cultural activities related to both people and firms or corporate organizations, including also the geographic interactions among all these actors and the ways policy-making bodies respond to and intervene in these processes. Regional science has found its origins in both North America and Europe, but has gradually expanded its wings also towards Asia, Australia and Latin America. It has in the mean time strong footholds in various Asian countries, e.g. Japan, Korea, China, Taiwan, Indonesia and India. It is therefore, conceivable that in the dynamic evolution and spread of regional science all over the world, the desire has grown to create a high-quality publication channel that would serve the needs of regional science scholars in the Asian–Pacific Rim, defined here in broad geographical terms. The birth of the *Asia–Pacific Journal of Regional Science* (APJRS) symbolizes the rising international recognition and research quality of scientists in this part of the world.

This first issue of APJRS aims to provide a collection of advanced regional science contributions with a particular view to the presentation of regional science research findings on the Asian–Pacific Rim or by scholars in this part of the world. This issue of the journal is devoted to an intriguing and challenging theme, viz. “Innovation and Ecology: Regional Science Perspectives on Spatial Systems”.

This special issue starts with the articulation of a general view on new advances in regional science research, in particular on the way new frontiers in research are

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identified and coped with. The authors, Antoine Bailly and Lay Gibson (2017), draw from their rich experience on the history of regional science important lessons and sketch various promising ways forward. They show convincingly the vitality and innovativeness in regional science theory, methodology and policy analysis.

The remaining part of this special issue of APJRS contains ten articles, subdivided over two subthemes of this volume “Spatial Dynamics and Innovation Systems”, and “Quality of Life and Spatial Systems”. Each part contains five contributions. We will now briefly highlight the most important features of these contributions.

The first five articles on ‘Spatial Dynamics and Innovation Systems’ address the ever changing spatial-economic landscapes in close connection with technological innovation and creative institutional responses. The first article, written by Yongda Yu, Junbo Yu, Xinglin Pan, and Roger Reece Stough (2017) deals with the surprising innovation dynamics in China and the way governance systems support this rapid evolution, revealing how the country is moving away from the dependence on imitation innovation as the basis of its manufacturing and service based economy.

The importance of governance in innovation systems is also at the core of the analysis developed by Jitendra Parajuli and Kingsley Haynes (2017), focused on the regulatory practices for the modernization of Internet infrastructures in Nepal. In our globalized contemporary world, innovation is closely linked to the development of information and communication technologies, a crucial condition for less developed economies.

The multifaceted role of innovation is observed by Suminori Tokunaga and Mitsuru Okiyama (2017) in the third article, analyzing the processes of economic development within Japanese regions, when facing two major contemporary problems affecting the country: the continuous process of an aging population and the occurrence of large scale natural disasters.

A comparison between spatial structures of innovation networks is proposed by Lim Hwajin and Kidokoro Tetsuo (2017), clarifying the relationship between spatial proximity and innovation networks within the different contexts of the Korean and Japanese innovation systems. The authors show that innovation policies must take these differences into account in order to achieve a flexible network governance.

Concluding the first part of this Special Issue, Yogi Vidyattama, Leonie Pearson, Robert Tanton and Itismita Mohanty (2017) analyze the impacts of unexpected severe climatic phenomena, focusing on the adaptive capacity of communities during the drought period in the Murray–Darling Basin (Australia). The authors identify different levels of creative resilience within different communities, depending on their characteristics and locations.

The second part of this Special Issue is devoted to ‘Quality of Life and Spatial Systems’ and addresses the way locational and destination choices of people and visitors shape the complex space economy, including spatial competition. This part contains also five contributions, including aspects related to safety conditions after natural disasters, inclusive urbanization processes, tourism dynamics and analysis of the efficiency of urban systems in different countries.

The first paper in this part is written by Shinobu Ito (2017), who analyzes locational choices and the impact of the provision of safety services, focusing on the role of public sectors to protect cities from natural disasters. Within the framework of location theory, the author integrates concepts related to welfare economics, proposing a land use model of urban economics.

Urban policies are also at the core of the analysis proposed by Alok Kumar Mishra and Prasanna Kumar Mohanty (2017), focusing on the conditions for inclusionary zoning and housing in the Asia–Pacific countries, especially in India. By addressing key issues of spatial exclusion and poverty in urban areas, the authors show that housing plans can be designed combining both efficiency and equity objectives.

In a broader sense, Soushi Suzuki, Karima Kourtit and Peter Nijkamp (2017) analyze the multi-dimensional performance of Asia–Pacific Super Cities, by ranking their efficiency taking into consideration the heterogeneity observed within their economic performance, technological innovativeness, environmental conditions, and cultural recognition and interaction. The author propose a performance improvement projection for inefficient cities.

The two final articles deal with different aspects of contemporary tourism dynamics in Japan. João Romão and Hisamitsu Saito (2017) develop a spatial analysis on the determinants of tourism performance in Japanese Prefectures, offering a contribution to explore potential synergies arising from inter-regional cooperation in crucial aspects for the development of this sector.

Finally, João Romão, Kazuo Machino and Peter Nijkamp (2017) analyze the potential development and foreseeable impact of wellness tourism services in the Prefecture of Hokkaido, identifying key factors for the utilization of local territorial resources, along with the ancient tradition of the Japanese bath (*onsen*), in order to promote a diversification of wellness services aiming at the sustainable development of this remote region of Japan.

The various contributions in this first issue of APJRS bring to light the surprising and unprecedented research dynamics in regional science. Its multidisciplinary orientation provides in principle many bonds and bridges with a great variety of other disciplines. This methodological diversity reinforces without any doubt the solidity and quality of regional science. It is clear that regional science has a significant role to play in the modern space economy, not only in its traditional heartlands but also in new territories like the Asian–Pacific Rim.

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