

Rezension / Book review

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The relationship between geography as a scientific discipline and knowledge as its object of research is a close and long-standing one. Not least because of the structural upheavals of the 1980s and 1990s, scientific interest in the production, acquisition, diffusion and spatial distribution of knowledge for economic purposes

remains unbroken to this day. While early contributions of the 1980s and 1990s formed the conceptual basis for the majority of research endeavours in the field of the geography of knowledge, research interests, research perspectives and associated epistemological positions have become differentiated over the past 25 years.

Against the background of a continually diversifying research field, the Klaus Tschira Symposia on Knowledge and Space have contributed to its advancement through encouraging and fostering the academic discourse and transferring scientific insights to civil society since the year 2006. The characteristics of knowledge and its relation to spatial contexts have been the subject of a total of 18 Symposia and resulted in a total of 17 books (four of which are in preparation) highlighting the variety of epistemological, ontological and methodological approaches in the scientific field of the geography of knowledge.

The latest publication in this book series is dedicated to knowledge and institutions. It extends the debate about the spatiality of knowledge by shedding light on the role of institutions as an important socio-spatial factor for the creation, acquisition, use and transfer of knowledge. The thematic focus on the interrelation between the socio-spatial production of knowledge and the local or regional institutional context takes up two different research strands. On the one hand, the integration of institutional theories in the study of regional disparities broadens academic enquiries by allowing the micro-level based study of social, economic and political

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systems. On the other hand, space and place play an emerging role for institutional theorists, offering ways of understanding institutional differences not only across places but also over time (*Glückler/Suddaby/Lenz*, p. 2 ff.). The integration of institutional and spatial perspectives contributes to an understanding of both the nature, dynamics and processes of institutional change, and of the influence of institutions on the creation and use of knowledge and vice versa. In order to enable this cross-fertilization of both spatial and institutional perspectives on the study of knowledge, the editors raise four lead questions in their introduction (*Glückler/Suddaby/Lenz*, p. 8 ff.): What exactly are institutions? What is the relation between space and institutions? How do institutions change? What effects do institutions have on the creation of knowledge and related social outcomes?

These lead questions are debated in twelve thematic chapters. Though the editors do not offer a definition of institutions themselves – the lack of a universal definition of institutions is a regularly raised concern – the authors of the first part of the book, “Challenges in Institutional Research”, introduce novel perspectives on the nature and characteristics of institutions. In the first chapters, *Farrell*, *Coraiola/Suddaby/Foster* and *Diaz-Bone* emphasise the informal, temporal and collective nature of institutions bearing essential points of reference for the study of institutional change and the impact of (altering) institutional contexts for the production of knowledge.

Based on empirical field studies located in Spain, Germany, France, around the Baltic Sea and the US, Chapters five to nine in the second part of the book, “Institutional Dynamics Between Continuity and Change”, discuss how institutions emerge and change over time. Impressively, the contributions by *Hess* and *Glückler/Lenz* demonstrate how traditions, i.e. institutions understood as collective modes of behaviour originating from the past, such as gastronomic societies in the Basque country and the ‘Walz’ in Germany, are not only preserved but moreover are adapted to modern times. Since civil society actively lives these traditions, they collectively alter them in a way that allows them to fit into changing institutional contexts. *Moodyson/Sack* extend the mutual interaction of institutions and institutional settings by emphasising that economic changes in a cluster demand changes in its institutional framework. Using the example of the region and associated spirits industry in Cognac (France), they demonstrate that though “[...] the rules of the game set the limits and define the possibility of change taking place, [...] change intrinsically also influences the rules of the game” (*Moodyson/Sack*, p. 151). Whereas the first three chapters of the second part

of the book deal with processes of adaptation, the following two chapters demonstrate how institutions and institutional fields are constructed. While *Ritvala* shows the empowerment of institutions through art and artistic interventions, *Zilber* highlights the power of language to create institutional proximity among participants of a conference.

The final part, “The Impact of Institutions on Regional Learning and Development”, tackles the question of regional disparities and heterogeneous regional development from an institutional perspective. Variations in the composition and structure of the institutional contexts and associated scope of actions are considered as the main reasons for unequal regional development. Embedded in a comparative design, *Storper* demonstrates the impact of local institutions and institutional structures on the innovativeness of regions. He considers institutional differences as the missing link explaining the unequal development of Greater Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area, which had comparable starting conditions in the 1970s but have followed different development paths and experienced particular regional transitions over the last fifty years. Whereas in this case neither of the paths is necessarily better than the other, *Rodríguez-Pose/Crescenzi/Di Cataldo* show the negative impact ill-designed and malfunctioning institutions have on regional development. By focusing on prestigious investments in transportation infrastructure, the authors show that such flagship projects benefit the interests of individuals and harm the interests of the many. Since they attribute these unfavourable decisions to weak institutions, they advocate institution building and, if necessary, restructuring existent local institutional environments. The fact that the renewal of local institutional contexts is a sensitive matter is explained by *Bathelt/Conserva*. In the Italian region Cavanese, home to an automotive-metallurgical and electronic-mechanics industry cluster, institutional hybridity (i.e. while some institutions respond to the emerging needs of a globalising economy other institutions express continuity) allows the introduction of the novelty required to support technological development and advancement without the harmful destruction of established and successful local structures. In the final chapter, *Tolbert/Coles* extend the research agenda of institutional perspectives in the field of the geography of knowledge by highlighting possible cross-fertilisations of both research streams. Furthering the interdisciplinary exchange may provide helpful for understanding entrepreneurial activities across time and place.

With the edited volume discussed here, the editors intend to bridge “[...] disciplinary boundaries within the social sciences to explore the spatial contextuality and temporal dynamics of institutions as well as their effects on knowledge creation and regional development” (*Glückler/Suddaby/Lenz*, p. 14). With their selection of theoretical and empirical contributions, the editors challenge dominant representations of the nature and characteristics of institutions, which so far have been largely focused on and limited to formal institutions or formalised rules in economic geography. Each contribution demonstrates impressively how both spatial and institutional theories benefit from an integrated perspective which emphasises time, space and place as mutually dependent influences on economic and institutional development. The implementation of the theoretical-conceptual considerations of the first chapters in the empirical contributions seems particularly effective. For example, *Farrel’s* understanding of institutions, which highlights the role of common belief in a specific mode of behaviour, allows understanding of the endogenous changes of institutions. This aspect is well-reflected in the study by *Glückler/Lenz* of the wandering years of craftsmen, which explains how and why this tradition is still maintained. The mutual expectations of individuals who are part of the relevant community contribute to the preservation and renewal of the tradition by aligning it to current legal frameworks. Similarly, temporal aspects introduced by *Coraiola/Suddaby/Foster* can be identified throughout all the contributions dealing with development and adaptation processes.

In summary, this edited volume provides fresh and novel ideas to think about institutions, their relation to knowledge building and socio-spatial outcomes.