

Book review

Evolutionary Economic Geography: Theoretical and Empirical Progress

Dieter Kogler (Ed.)

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Back in 2006, Ron Boschma and Koen Frenken published a seminal paper in which they raised the following question: “why is economic geography not an evolutionary science?” (Boschma and Frenken, 2006). In this paper, they argued that some of the most promising advances in economic geography were already embedded in evolutionary thinking, playing out at the interface of the two divergent approaches – neoclassical and institutional – which traditionally formed the stepping stones of research in the field. Hence, beyond just looking at place-based (uneven) economic dynamics, evolutionary economic geography (EEG) sought to actually identify and examine the factors underpinning those dynamics utilising an evolutionary framework. Since then, EEG has become a highly influential research paradigm in economic geography while permeating other fields such as regional economics, innovation studies and local and regional development.

Ten years later, this edited collection takes stock of EEG’s notable conceptual and empirical progress, while highlighting research avenues for the years to come. Yet it must be said right away that this is not a “standard” book – it is a collection of articles (re-)published from a recent special issue of *Regional Studies* (2015). As this publishing strategy is not so frequent, one can wonder about the reason for it. Although this is not explained anywhere in the book, reading between the lines it appears that the ambition was to crystalize a number of frameworks and state-of-the-art contributions to illustrate what EEG-inspired studies look like, in a vehicle that could reach wider audiences than a journal issue alone. Although uncommon, I do believe this makes sense. On the one hand, the quality and wide scope of the contributions do provide a comprehensive view on the principal tenets, concerns and methods followed by EEG scholars; moreover, at a time when scholarly output takes the form of individual and fragmented scientific papers, it is refreshing to have the chance to access cutting-edge scholarship in a single well-integrated volume, made more readily available to audiences less versed in the EEG paradigm.

Just like in the original special issue, the book starts with Kogler's introductory editorial, followed by eleven distinctive chapters. The editorial is an interesting read in its own right; it synthesises the editor’s view of what EEG and its core tenets are about, and sets out the ground for the rest of the book, with a short introduction to each

chapter. It sounded to me that a key underlying concern of the book was to prove that EEG has not turned into an inward-looking, single framework agenda, but into a diverse research field able to engage with different types of theoretical foundations and methodological traditions. The eleven chapters in the book illustrate that. The first two are conceptual contributions that, after taking stock of early EEG developments, provide new conceptualizations and avenues to understand uneven regional economic development, namely by discussing a developmental turn in EEG (Chapter 1) and a new EEG-informed notion of regional resilience (Chapter 2). Chapters 3 to 11 are empirical studies exploring the broad range of factors and mechanisms behind regional economic dynamics and change, namely technological branching (Chapters 3 and 4), external-to-the-region knowledge linkages (Chapter 5), spatial diffusion of technologies (Chapter 6), knowledge interactions across industries in regions (Chapter 7), cluster evolution (Chapter 8), the role of innovation policies in industrial renewal (Chapter 9), education mismatch and labour mobility (Chapter 10) and the link between knowledge networks and urban form (Chapter 11).

Besides its thematic diversity, this book has a number of other salient merits. First, it brings together most of the leading names in the field in a collection of state-of-the-art, extensively peer-reviewed contributions. Second, with six quantitative (Chapters 3 to 7 and 10) and three qualitative (Chapters 8, 9 and 11) empirical studies, the book does keep to the promise of illustrating different EEG methodological traditions, with a picture that probably is not too far from the actual quants/quals balance among EEG scholars. Third, the contributions take on board multiple scales of analysis – including regions (e.g. Chapter 10), clusters (Chapter 8), metropolitan areas (Chapter 3), global networks (Chapter 5) and urban districts (Chapter 11) – highlighting the broad possibilities for EEG-inspired frameworks. Finally, beyond presenting sound examples of what EEG studies have looked like until now, the book also examines less common approaches focusing on the analysis of policy programmes (Chapter 8) and the impacts of urban form (Chapter 9).

Having said that, I also found a number of drawbacks and some disappointment at a number of missed opportunities with this book. Naturally, as a special issue conversion, the editor cannot fully control submissions or the acceptance of the articles in the journal; yet, it was disappointing that some leading proponents of (even) more pluralistic EEG approaches (e.g., grounded on institutional, relational and political economy analyses) did not figure in the list of contributors. I also found it a pity that the book could not reflect the extent to which the EEG paradigm is making inroads in other fields, for example, in the study of the evolution of tourism activities and tourism destinations.

On a more formal side, the reverse side of the coin about such an article-based book is the repetition of arguments and the difficulty in finding a common thread or line of argument. It would probably be an extremely daunting task, but I would also have liked to see a concluding or synthesising additional chapter, a bit more detailed than the introduction, dealing not just with overall reflections, but also with general policy dimensions, potential research avenues and promising extensions of EEG not covered in the collection. Indeed, if this book was targeted to wider audiences than those of a journal's special issue, such a synthesising and "translation" effort would have been very useful.

To sum up, I think this is an important volume that can be useful both for economic geographers and for other audiences interested in evolutionary thinking and place-based development overall. The issues analysed by EEG – specifically territorially uneven economic development – actually go far beyond economic geography and touch upon other related fields of socio-economic enquiry and policy. Hence, this book

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can be an insightful read for those in other disciplines who are interested in or seeking to gain inspiration from this rapidly growing research paradigm.

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