

Preface

This special issue originated around the theme of spatial development in Northern Europe. A source of inspiration has been the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) and the numerous studies conducted within the programme. Originally, we welcomed European spatial analyses, both regional and transnational. The focus was on the economic, social and political aspects of geographic studies dealing with regional development, as well as border studies and various fields of economic geography. We gave special consideration to papers addressing Nordic issues.

Articles accepted to this special issue of *Fennia* cover the topics mentioned above and range from theoretical considerations of spatial innovation systems to cross-border co-operation. The volume consists of four articles devoted to regional co-operation and development on transnational level. They are based on both theoretical and empirical research. The included papers also describe and reflect on the contextualised key elements of knowledge-based growth according to location factors.

The issue begins its exploration of regional dynamics with theoretical analyses of scale and temporality in innovation systems. Using a conceptual approach, with examples of executed foresight projects, the opening paper presents the complexities and theoretical challenges involved in spatial analysis. The two following papers analyze in particular the innovation policy options used to support regions in a transnational context. The papers provide insights both at the transnational Nordic level, including innovation policy options in Finland, Sweden and Norway, and local cases from Northern Finland. Particular attention is paid to the concept of regional development zones. After dealing with regional development, the issue moves on to present the final paper and concludes with a discussion of cross-border issues concerning the Finnish-Russian frontier.

As our studies illustrate, geographical domains of innovation systems, cross-border co-operation and regional development zones have had an increasing impact on regional studies and economic geography during recent decades. Spatial dynam-

ics and scalar processes are background factors underlying the actualization of regional development. The analyses show that making beneficial use of new tools to support regional growth requires a sound understanding of economic factors of scale, inter-organizational co-operation models and public sector development policies. There is evidence that deterministic thinking in terms of readily created and copied “best practice” models or structures is in most cases not sufficient to assess the geographical domain of spatial (re)structuring and economic regional development.

It is obvious that transnational and transregional contexts and value systems should be recognized more strongly. The same applies to multi-actor development processes and the multiplicity of scales. Joint agreements between public, private and university sectors have become an essential mode for regional development actions. Methods for facilitating growth in regional structures and enhancing core-periphery interactions require problem solving that involves several actors. These can be associated with multiple layers of actors operating on different spatial scales. The operational level is, however, local. For example, the diffusion of knowledge resources from one locality to another will eventually lead to an expansion of knowledge on a region. In time, the knowledge level of a nation will increase.

North Europe provides a good and feasible starting point for such analyses. We see clear added value when discussing innovation systems and prerequisites for economic success. It seems that various layers of centrality vs. peripherality overlap in particularly diverse and interesting ways in the Nordic countries. Absolute distances have not fully lost their significance even if factors such as access to education and ability to cater to innovative entrepreneurship have an increasing role in setting the scene for regional development.

The papers of this special issue will help to develop an understanding of these currently topical aspects of regional development for academic researchers as well as for professionals and policy makers. These topics are connected to ongoing

discussions of regional economic growth. The pivotal question is the future location of economic activities – and how regional shares of economic growth are distributed. We hope that this special issue, together with the previous special issue (volume 184:1) of *Fennia*, which deals with similar topics, will add new knowledge to this fascinating sub-discipline of geography.

Finally, we want to thank the contributors and the editorial staff of *Fennia* for providing the opportunity to produce this peer reviewed special issue. We hope that this issue brings forth new ideas and stimulates future research interest in the fields of economic geography and regional development. We also want to warmly thank the expert

scholars who acted as reviewers in the editorial process.

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