

Foreword

From the late 1980s many researchers and commentators were claiming that the contemporary revolution in information and communication technologies (ICTs) would herald the end of geography. Location would no longer matter as the diffusion of adoption of innovations in telecommunications and transportation would render distance redundant, economic activities would become footloose to be able to locate anywhere, workers would all be telecommuting, and agglomeration economies—whereby many economic activities tend to concentrate in big cities—would no longer be a force.

Of course with the progression of time, those predictions have not turned out to be the reality. Indeed despite the potential ‘location liberating’ effects of ICTs, it remains increasingly it is the mega-city regions that are largely the incubators of creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship. In particular they are the places across the globe where most of the knowledge-based and information-intensive ‘new economy’ activities are located. While ICTs and new forms of transport have ‘shrunk distance’ and enabled many more economic activities to become footloose, nonetheless it would seem that agglomeration economies remain alive and well, and that the big cities continue to attract disproportionate shares of higher value-added economic activity and the creation of higher-income jobs. There is no doubt that the ICT revolution has led to greater flexibility in the production chain process for both goods and services, and has facilitated the emergence of new forms of business networks, but often these have strengthened the role of agglomeration economies. And as Richard Florida tells us, it is the big cities that are the paces that generate the dynamics driving creativity across a wide spectrum of activities.

The uneven distribution of both the production of ICTs and of the consumption of ICT-derived products has significant implications for social equity. As has always been the case, new technologies and the processes and forces that drive the location decisions of firms result in uneven spatial patterns in the distribution of jobs and employment opportunities in different industry sectors and occupations, affecting patterns of migration and the degree to which places—both large and small—grow, stagnate, or decline. Certainly it would seem that a concentration of ICTs, and of creative and entrepreneurial activity, acts as a strong endogenous process in regional economic development and the performance of a place. And over time that can perpetuate and even exacerbate spatial inequalities that affect the quality of life and well-being of some socio-economic and ethnic groups of people and the places where they live.

It is then of considerable importance that we not only better understand the processes underlying the innovation and adoption of new technologies—especially ICTs—and the broader processes of creativity generating knowledge-based and information-intensive activities, but also that we know more about the resultant distributional outcomes, both spatially and socially. That gives rise to the need for a concern about the public policy implications arising from those phenomena and how they may be addressed through development and planning strategies and programs at all levels of government, from the national level through to the local level.

This volume, edited by Tan Yigitcanlar, Koray Velibeyoglu, and Scott Baum, represents an ambitious attempt to address the multiple issues concerning how creative urban regions might harness technologies to support the development of what they refer to as “knowledge city initiatives.” The chapter authors bring a diverse set of perspectives and provide a rich set of case studies on this important issue which confronts cities in the ‘digital age.’

The book is heavily oriented to perspectives being addressed in planning and by planners in addressing the implications of ICTs for policy and planning at the local or regional level. Importantly it includes case studies from both developed and developing nations. Some of the chapters focus attention on the relationships between urbanization, creativity, and knowledge and economic development. Many of the 17 chapters include descriptions and evaluations of policy initiatives and the role of ICTs in regional development in places as diverse as Washington DC in the United States, Singapore, Hyderabad in India, Sao Paulo in Brazil, Marmara and Istanbul in Turkey, and Oulu in Finland. Some chapters explicitly discuss examples of innovations in the role of e-governance in the digital age. And some of the chapters focus specifically on an analysis of the spatial patterns of ICTs in cities.

There is much in this book to interest readers from fields wider than planning, and it will have appeal to urbanists from many disciplines. It is a welcome contribution to the growing literature on creativity, technologies, and cities, and how public policy and planners may address the challenge of harnessing ICTs to improve outcomes for business and people in the digital age.

Robert J. Stimson
University of Queensland, Australia