Chapter V

The Role of Place: Tasmanian Insights on ICT and Regional Development

Dean Steer, University of Tasmania, Australia
Paul Turner, University of Tasmania, Australia

ABSTRACT

Despite continued rhetoric that information and communication technologies (ICTs) make ‘place’ irrelevant in a global networked economy, insights from regional areas suggest a different and more complex experience. This chapter examines the issues surrounding the concepts of place in regional areas and ICT-based regional development, as a vehicle to dispel some prevalent ICT-related themes that permeate discussions in this sphere. These issues open up a broader debate on what is meant by ICT-supported development in a regional context, how it can best be achieved and what insights have been developed from past experiences in Tasmania, Australia.
INTRODUCTION

“Since the early days of the Internet, the death of distance and the associated devaluation of geo-location have continued to be popular themes. However, as technologies, and our understandings of cyberspace have grown and matured, it is becoming evident that geography continues to exert its influence.” (Ramasubramanian, 2002)

“It is no accident that there are so many successful semiconductor (companies) in California. It is not just that all the managers in California were smarter than the managers everywhere else.” (James, 2002)

The prevalence of technological determinism and economic rationalism within academic and business discussions on the role of technology in regional development is witnessed by the recent emergence in the literature of the ‘king’s new clothes’ insight that ‘place’ still matters. For those living and working in regional Australia the reduction in basic services and lack of adequate or affordable telecommunications infrastructure has for some time been very much a part of their everyday experience of the ‘information economy’.

From a research perspective, while information and communication technologies (ICTs) open the global economy up to a region they also expose it to global competition and its associated socio-economic uncertainties (Barling & Castleman, 2000; Coulthard, 2001; Wilde, Swatman, & Castleman, 2000). Clearly, glib statements promising regions unequivocal benefits from conducting business ‘anytime, anyplace, anywhere’ mask the more difficult processes of how to meaningfully evaluate the impacts of ICT on regional development. More significantly, there has been considerable confusion in the literature over what is meant by regional development, how it is to be achieved and what role ICT can play in reviving and sustaining regional communities.

Until recently, research in this field has focused almost exclusively on the role of ICT in urban economic development or on its impact on farming enterprises. The impact of ICT on the social fabric of the community has been given little attention, with an implicit underlying assumption being — what is good for the economy is good for the community. More recently there has been recognition of the need to examine and assess the social, cultural, and psychological impact of ICT. However, despite the emergence of research on ICT in developing countries and to a lesser extent regional areas, the majority of this work continues to be centred on urban economic development. Given that ICT impact on all aspects of society, marginalising fundamental questions about the role of ICT in social and community development is highly problematic, particularly in less economically affluent regions.
In Search of Indicators for Assessing Smart and Sustainable Cities and Communities’ Performance

The Role of the Creation and Sharing of Digital Media Content in Participatory E-Planning
www.igi-global.com/article/role-creation-sharing-digital-media/66409?camid=4v1a