

LITERATURE

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Doloreux, D., Freel, M. and Shearmur, R. eds: Knowledge-Intensive Business Services. Geography and Innovation. Ashgate, Aldershot, 2010, 246 p.

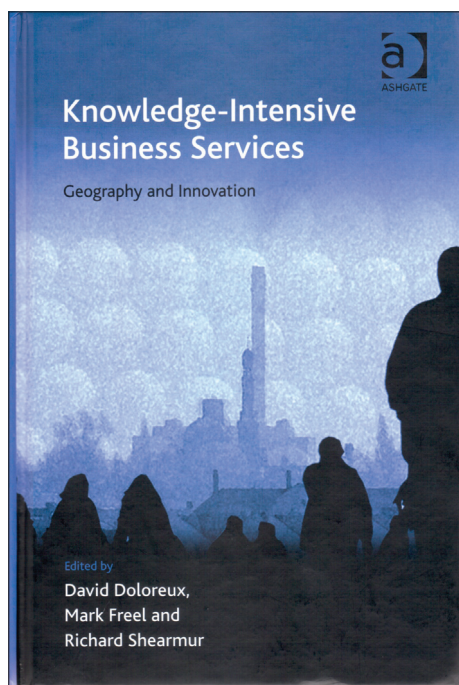
Studies focused on knowledge-intensive business services (KIBS) have been embedded into and stimulated by academic discourses over theorization of ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ in the contemporary (global) capitalism (see e.g. LYOTARD, J.F. 1984; HARVEY, D. 1989; BRYSON, J. *et al.* 2004) and also by practical (policy) debates over competitiveness of firms and national economies for the last three decades. As various fields and disciplines got involved in conceptualizing the production and circulation of knowledge, research approaches towards KIBS grew increasingly transdisciplinary, and concerned with space – analysing intra-firm and inter-firm relations across geographical scales, and revealing their socio-cultural embeddedness (AMIN, A. and COHENDET, P. 2004). Although, such studies are focused dominantly on “advanced” economies of the traditional core regions, they provided and increasingly sophisticated view of knowledge-production as an engine of economic restructuring.

This book contributes to understanding the role of knowledge intensive business services as drivers of innovation – how KIBS support innovation and how KIBS innovate themselves –, and also to explaining uneven development in the context of production, management and exchange of knowledge. The studies published in the book are “resolutely

empirical” (p. 8), discussing KIBS activities in different institutional and cultural (basically, in European and North American) contexts.

The nine case-studies provide a deep insight into the drivers and mechanisms of knowledge production, discussing the types of knowledge are produced and exchanged and how people and organisations interact in this process. Although, the analyses are focused on different geographical scales, discussing the globalization of KIBS, their role in regional differentiation of a national economy, the knowledge flows in regional innovation systems, and also within KIBS firms, the majority of studies suggest that knowledge production and exchange take place across geographical scales – and yet, they are shaped by particular local and regional contexts largely.

In lack of space for a detailed review of results, I do not follow the logic of book that is organised around geographical scales. Instead, the authors’ findings shall be discussed in relation to key issues well-



known in service studies, such as the conceptualisation of KIBS, the production of knowledge and innovation within the KIBS firms, moreover, the interfirm relations through which KIBS stimulate innovation in other organisations – all interpreted as processes producing space.

The authors share the widely discussed and accepted *conception of KIBS* as producers and mediators of knowledge. This role rests on a highly complex and diverse process of information and knowledge sourcing (see *TRIPPL* and *TÖDTLING* in Chapter 8) and on a creative manipulation of those in particular organisational and spatial contexts – the constant reproduction of the core asset (expertise) of KIBS firms (see *WARF* in Chapter 2 and *MULLER, ZENKER* and *HÉRAUD* in Chapter 10). In geographical terms, KIBS are conceptualized as highly networked *and* locally (regionally) embedded activities that act across geographical scales while sourcing and mediating knowledge.

Nevertheless, putting knowledge in the focus drove some authors to conceptualize KIBS in the wider context of social reproduction (e.g. considering medical services and higher education as knowledge intensive business services; see *WARF* in Chapter 2), that might stimulate further debate over the definition, and over KIBS-related policies. Moreover, the discussion of KIBS' role in different macroeconomic and socio-cultural contexts (cultural milieu and social practices) highlighted how diverse knowledge production and exchange are in core economies, and thus, how conceptualisation of KIBS is shaped by local/regional processes and conditions (see *SHEARMUR, ASLESEN* and *ISAKSEN; KAUTONEN* and *HYYPÄÄ; DOLOREUX, DEFAZIO* and *RANGDROL* in Chapter 3, 5, 6 and 9).

To understand the role of KIBS providers as “innovators in their own right” (*FREEL*, p. 75), knowledge sourcing, development of new ideas and expertise, and the management of such processes within firms are key issues discussed by most of the authors. Studies focused on *knowledge sourcing* argue against simplified approaches that rest on local buzz-global pipelines dichotomy. The authors' empirical results suggest a highly diverse process in which, a number of agents (clients/users, competitors, suppliers, R&D institutions, universities, development agencies, networked professional communities) are acting as sources and/or co-producers of knowledge at different geographical scales through various (formal and informal) channels of information flow (see Chapter 4, 5, 6 and 8 by *FREEL; ASLESEN* and *ISAKSEN; KAUTONEN* and *HYYPÄÄ; TRIPPL* and *TÖDTLING*).

The book suggests that knowledge sourcing is a diverse process that depends on the nature of services provided (professional expertise-based vs. technology-related activities/P-KIBS vs. T-KIBS), on the size KIBS firms, and on the business (innovation) strategy adopted by a particular organisation. Moreover, as KIBS innovations rely highly on localized formal and informal relations (advantages of agglomeration economies and network externalities), knowledge sourcing should be discussed as a locally/regionally embedded process. Studies focused local context of knowledge sourcing (see *KAUTONEN* and *HYYPÄÄ; TRIPPL* and *TÖDTLING; DOLOREUX, DEFAZIO* and *RANGDRO* in Chapter 6, 8 and 9) highlight, how uneven development in metropolitan/non-metropolitan, core/peripheral, and in high-tech-based/public sector-oriented regions are driven by having (or not having) access to information and expertise.

Knowledge production is also discussed as a networked process (co-produced with other agents, primarily, with clients) that is ranging from customization of well-known recipes to innovative solutions to the clients' problems (see Chapter 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8 by *WARF; SHEARMUR; FREEL; LANDRY, AMARA* and *DOLOREUX; TRIPPL* and *TÖDTLING*). The studies suggest that, project-based work that grew dominant in the KIBS sector is a source of new expertise and diverse knowledge management practices (codification, developing tacit knowledge and the combination of those). Nevertheless, it is also stressed that knowledge production rests on capacities of KIBS firms, primarily on the skills of KIBS staff and the

use of advanced technologies (see LANDRY, AMARA and DOLOREUX; TRIPPL and TÖDTLING in Chapter 7 and 8). An in-depth analysis of this process is provided by MULLER, ZENKER and HÉRAUD (Chapter 10), who identified the key agents of knowledge production (“knowledge angels”), searched their skills and qualities – that are over-arching disciplinary and organisational boundaries, and rest on professional expertise as well as on creative capacities –, and defined their strategic functions within intra-firm and wider networks.

The widely discussed role of KIBS as mediators of knowledge, and as such, stimulators and supporters of innovation (technological and organisational change, problem solving, crisis management, knowledge transfer etc.) in other organisations is also put in the focus of the book. Types of knowledge produced and mediated, channels and methods of exchange, and the geography of those was researched empirically in different regional and national contexts.

A key issue discussed by most of the authors is the problem of tacit and codified knowledge. As the results of LANDRY *et al.*, as well as of TRIPPL and TÖDTLING (Chapter 7 and 8) suggest, we should shift from this dichotomy: both types of knowledge are (re)produced and exchanged at once in client-KIBS provider relationships. For this, we should understand the complexity of knowledge exchange in various organisational and spatial contexts. This problem was discussed in a particular spatial context by the authors who adopted regional innovation system (RIS) approach as a conceptual framework. ASLESEN and ISAKSEN (Chapter 5) analysed the role of KIBS as mediators between agents (business/institutional) of RIS that have different knowledge basis; TRIPPL and TÖDTLING (Chapter 8) focused on distinct types of KIBS as mediators by their innovative activities in the Vienna software cluster, while DOLOREUX *et al.* highlighted (Chapter 9), how knowledge mediation is culturally embedded and how this function works within more distant relationships in Canada.

The authors were considered also with the *geography of knowledge mediation*. Although, knowledge production in KIBS firms is stimulated by locally (regionally) embedded relations that produce hierarchical and centralised spatial structures, knowledge mediation does not follow such patterns necessarily. It occurs across geographical scales, linking users and providers, connecting different regional innovation systems, and local businesses to global flows, as it is suggested by SHEARMUR; FREEL; KAUTONEN and HYYPIA (Chapter 3, 4 and 6).

Although, there are no strikingly new concepts introduced in the book, it helps the reader to understand knowledge production and exchange as a highly complex, multi-scalar process, that is shaped by intrafirm processes, different socio-cultural contexts (spaces and places interlinked by various networks), by macro-economic processes of national markets, as well as by local “buzz” of interpersonal/inter-organisational relations. Moreover, the authors’ empirical results make the reader uneasy enough to re-think “settled” definitions and categories, and open further discussion on knowledge-related issues in social sciences. Finally, the authors highlight, how uneven development is driven through knowledge production, and how inequalities are being (re)produced by being involved or excluded from flows of information and expertise.

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