

Handbook of Regions and Competitiveness: Contemporary Theories and Perspectives on Economic Development

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The rise of the concept of regional competitiveness has led to many emerging frameworks and applications employed across various contexts. There is a growing consensus that regions have become the principal spatial units that compete to attract investment and generate knowledge flows, which gives rise to agglomerations or clusters of industrial and sectoral activity. The cluster concept continues to be a field of contested theoretical debate, particularly for arguments concerning the extent to which places actually compete for resources and markets. This debate and the relevance of regional competitiveness extend outside the realms of academia, to policy deliberation at all levels of government.

The current *Handbook* builds on the previous works of the editors ([Huggins et al., 2014](#)) and others ([Martin et al., 2006](#)) on regional competitiveness. This handbook aims to take account of regional competitiveness and other complementary concepts and provide a thoughtful discussion of contemporary theories, perspectives and empirical explanations shedding light on the sources and determinants of uneven development across regions. Drawing on an international field of leading scholars, the book begins with an introduction of the theoretical foundations of regional competitiveness. Subsequently, in six parts, more in-depth discussions of the key competitiveness factors, the emergence of related concepts, the empirical applications and the policy context are provided.

Chapter 1 offers a useful introduction and overview of key concepts within the context of established theories of endogenous growth and development and contemporary theoretical contexts such as regional growth systems, institutions, cultural and behavioural systems, resilience and well-being.

Part I “Regional Competitiveness, Economic Development and Growth” provides reviews of various models of regional growth developed in the literature over the last 40 years (Chapter 4: Harris); more current concepts (Chapter 6: Malecki); measurements of competitiveness, such as the regional competitiveness index (RCI) for Europe (Chapter 3: Annoni and Dijkstra); and technological and social capabilities indicators at the regional level (Chapter 5: Fagerberg and Srholec). It also addresses how future research investigating regional growth and change might best be adapted to meet the current challenges (Chapter 2: Storper).

PART II “The Principal Elements of Regional Competitiveness” extends the overview and presents new measures of regional competitiveness such as “Beyond GDP” goals (Chapter 7: Aiginger and Firgo) and those based on the overlap of product markets of exporting firms and universities, and the attraction of FDI (Chapter 8: Van Oort and



Thissen). When assessing regional competitiveness, Fratessi (Chapter 9) argues for a dynamic framework, similar to firm competitiveness, and Huggins and Thompson (Chapter 11) contend that regional growth is partly a function of the network of capital stocks of regions.

Alongside the competitiveness concept, resilience – the way in which different subjects react to, and recover from, adverse shocks – has received increasingly significant attention. Part III “Regional Competitiveness, Resilience and Quality” discusses the development of regional resilience and the importance of considering an evolutionary perspective (Chapter 12: Crespo *et al.*), how it relates to concepts such as regional competitiveness (Chapter 13: Martin and Sunley) and its application to two Italian regions (Chapter 14: Cellini *et al.*).

PART IV “Competitiveness and Emerging Regions” questions if current concepts of regional competitiveness and innovation are as applicable for emerging regions as they are for developed regions. Chapters 16 (Rodriguez-Pose and Wilkie) and 18 (Lengyel) examine peripheral and transitioning economies in Europe, while Turok, in Chapter 17, reasons that the organisation of the urban land and infrastructure system (ULIS) is fundamental to regional prosperity for the global South.

The focus in Part V turns to the significance of urban regions and city competitiveness. It includes studies that cover urban sustainable competitiveness (Chapter 19: Ni and Wang), competition and cooperation between cities (Chapter 20; Shen) and measuring urban competitiveness in Europe (Chapter 21: Saez and Periañez).

The final section, PART VI “Regional Competitiveness Strategies and Policy” seeks to address the gap between the significant literature on regional competitiveness and the framework for policymakers in conceiving, formulating and implementing policies to enhance regional competitiveness. Ketels, in Chapter 22, discusses the functions that regional governments are capable of carrying out, and in Chapter 23, Audretsch *et al.* provide a framework for the strategic management of places and regions. The final two chapters relate regional competitiveness to the EU’s smart specialisation strategy (Chapter 24: McCann and Ortega-Argilés; and Chapter 25: Aranguren *et al.*).

This contemporary *Handbook* makes a significant contribution to the field of regional competitiveness. It provides a valuable reference for both academics and students in the fields of economic geography and spatial economics, especially those undertaking a PhD in this area, as it provides a broad introduction to core concepts and development of regional competitiveness, as well as a multitude of relevant references cited by the authors. Policy formulation in economic development has tended to move ahead of understanding and analysis; this book aids in closing the gap in understanding between theory and policy development. It will appeal to policymakers and other stakeholders who want to gain a contemporary understanding of the topic and the role for regions in policymaking.

The relevance of this handbook is clear in providing a definitive contemporary resource for regional competitiveness, as Audretsch *et al.* affirm (2017, p. 519): “There is no one formula for regional competitiveness [...] each region must capitalize on its unique strengths, and pursue strategies that enhance and amplify these advantages”. Within the chapters is the search to identify the various determinants of regional development by assessing the fundamental theoretical debates and discourses. The result is an increased understanding of both upstream and downstream factors that promote regional competitiveness in the form of long-term and sustained economic growth and development. The diverse nature of the chapters highlights the differences

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that still exist around the concept, measurement and application of regional competitiveness.

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