

Note from the Editors

This issue casts a timely eye over two themes that we judge to be important for the future practice of regional development in many parts of the world and especially in Australia. The first theme, containing four articles, the sustainability of people's and communities' well-being in Australia's remoter regions – especially in the Northern Territory. This focus is particularly welcome as remote Australia experiences some of Australia's worst economic, social, health and educational conditions. And despite years of government promises to remedy such ills, outsiders often perceive little real improvement in the conditions experienced in remote locations. The second theme is one close to my personal interests, namely how to increase regions' capacities for entrepreneurship, innovation, adaptiveness, risk-taking and distributing the necessary venture capital. Two articles contribute to this theme, but from highly contrasting perspectives, the newly industrialising world of urban Brazil and the survival of SMEs in sparsely settled rural Australia. Nevertheless one can inform the other.

Returning to the first theme, Zhao and his colleagues analyse the necessity for many indigenous people to travel sometimes considerable distances for treatment of various health conditions and the impact that this has on the recording of regional mortality rates. In particular, they deduce that mortality rates in urban locations are probably over-stated as the result of patient relocation for treatment, while those in remote outstations are in reality under-stated. In our second article, Becker and her team diagnose a persistent concern in many rural locations of being able to access and retain employees with relevant skill-sets, especially in what seems to be an era of more mobile workforces as demonstrated in the mining boom. Their focus on whole-of-community approaches to this task – involving businesses, local governments, and community groups – seems most appropriate. Blackwell and Dollery then examine how the fruits of sample mining industries in remote locations are shared between labour and capital and suggesting that, compared to other industry sectors, mining pays its workers well. The regional multiplier effects will, of course, depend in part on where the workers actually live in our increasingly Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) and Drive In Drive Out (DIDO) world. The final article in this cluster, written by Natalie Stoeckl and her colleagues examines how water supply costs and constraints in the Territory might impact on differentially on indigenous and non-indigenous peoples and how water might best be used to close the development gap between them. It seems to the authors that irrigation-

intensive agriculture is not the solution for closing that development gap. So these papers contain a wealth of policy-relevant ideas for sustainable local development. But they also demonstrate the speed, complexity and often uncertainty of framing workable public policy or, for that matter, private actors navigating a risky business environment.

The need to spur regional innovatory and adaptive capacity is addressed by two related, but nevertheless quite contrasting approaches, tailored to two rather different environments. Garcia and his team examine the nexus between university research and industry-spin-offs, but in Brazil (one of the BRICS) not the likes of Silicon Valley. Geography matters, with the pace on scale of industry effects being greater in the vicinity of major research institutions. However, the scale of these effects varies to some degree between industry sectors, which is also important. And our final contribution is a more conceptual analysis of how to increase the intensity of SME innovation and adaptation in the vast and sparsely settled arena of rural Australia where the agreed criteria for rapid, focused, and entrepreneurial innovation hardly exist. This is crucially important, because SMEs are the backbone of regional economies, but simultaneously often the most threatened by constant change and adjustment around a fragile economic base – mining and agriculture. Their recommendation of Living Laboratories is fascinating and harnessed to the ICT flavour of our age where interpersonal connections operate in a virtual world.

So this issue is challenging in many ways and has something for almost all our readers. We hope you find it as thought provoking as we did in our role of editors.

Tony Sorensen
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