



## Reinforcing regions in precarious times

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EDITORIAL



## Reinforcing regions in precarious times

Ivan Turok  and Madeleine Hatfield 

The fragile state of the current world order has become increasingly apparent over the last year. A series of profound changes have coalesced to create a climate of uncertainty and anxiety in many regions and nations. The most significant symptom of the new situation may be the stalling of globalization, with wide-ranging causes and consequences (Ó hUallacháin, Douma, & Kane, 2017). Various political, demographic, technological and environmental shifts are additional sources of social instability and disruption. The implications for cities and regions of the multiple transitions and transformations currently underway are unclear and unpredictable. The stakes seem to be high, with sizeable gaps opening up between the people and places emerging as winners and losers from these processes (Gagliardi & Perco, 2017; Quatraro & Usai, 2017).

A fundamental shift in economic power and political influence from Western countries towards the East is having extensive reverberations for patterns of trade, investment and geopolitical alliances (Dunford et al., 2016; Horner, 2016). This coincides with diminished dynamism in many advanced economies, attributable to a slowdown in productivity growth and ageing demographics. The effects include stagnant real incomes, which have fuelled social discontent and unrest, and given rise to populist pressures with unexpected electoral outcomes (Los, McCann, Springford, & Thissen, 2017). A backlash against immigration and resurgent secession movements in many countries promise simple, insular solutions to the predicament (Convery & Lundberg, 2017). Yet, the consequences of inward-looking policies often set back economic progress and human development. Rising protectionism and other isolationist tendencies have also contributed to a slowdown in international trade and cross-border financial flows. Unsurprisingly, there is much to research and debate about the idea of globalization going into reverse, or 'de-globalisation' (Turok et al., 2017).

Technological change is undoubtedly contributing to the sense of dislocation. The disruptive power of new technology has become increasingly apparent in the 'big data' revolution, the mobile internet, advanced materials, three-dimensional (3D) printing and sophisticated robotics (see Hervás-Oliver, Albors-Garrigos, Estelles-Miguel, & Boronat-Moll, 2017, on radical innovation). The extent of change is epitomized

by the notion of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the fusion of physical, digital and biological innovations. New technologies offer the potential to connect disparate communities in useful ways and to improve the responsiveness of public and private organizations (Larty, Jack, & Lockett, 2017). They could also improve the functional efficiency of cities and help to tackle climate change and other environmental hazards (see Rossi, 2016, on smart cities). However, such innovations also threaten people and places that struggle to adapt (Pugh, 2017), and raise growing concerns about personal security and the safety of communities in the face of terror networks. In addition, narrow elites could capture the bulk of the benefits of new technologies and thereby reinforce social fragmentation and spatial inequalities.

Regional research is vital to inform public debates and facilitate appropriate policy responses. In an era of 'fake news', 'alternative facts' and corrupt leaders, robust knowledge, sound evidence and rigorous policy evaluation are essential correctives (Fratesi & Wishlade, 2017). Disruption is also evident in the globalized journal publishing industry, with the proliferation of competing knowledge platforms and support services to access information. Interestingly, this puts a premium on the highest-quality, most-visible, readily available research from trusted sources and subject to rigorous peer review. Fortunately, *Regional Studies* is well placed to benefit from the growing global demand for reliable knowledge, given its extensive network of authors and referees, well-established editorial team, and support from a learned society – the Regional Studies Association (RSA) – and reputable publisher – the Taylor & Francis Group.

Last year was very eventful for *Regional Studies* as it celebrated its 50th anniversary and a new cover and page design heralded the next stage in the life of the journal. This coincided with an improved journal impact factor (2.780) and ranking (9/79 in Geography, 34/347 in Economics and 21/105 in Environmental Studies). As well as being cited, *Regional Studies* articles are being read at ever greater rates around the world and the journal continues to see significant increases in its download figures. Authors and readers will also be pleased to read that the backlog to print publication has been reduced to approximately eight months

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from article acceptance. Prompt publication allows the journal pages to reflect the latest research and ideas in regional studies. Accepted articles are, of course, published online even more quickly.

The first issue of 2017 was specially commissioned to reflect on the current and future state of regional studies. At the time of writing, three of the papers have already been viewed more than 2000 times (e.g., Ballas, Dorling, & Hennig, 2017; Keating, 2017; Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, & Tomaney, 2017). These debates clearly resonate across a wide field and the special issue will soon be published as part of the RSA's Regions and Cities book series (Turok et al., 2018). The contributors deserve special appreciation for accepting the challenge to produce agenda-setting articles on a tight timeframe, along with the referees and editors who worked hard to ensure the published papers were of the highest quality.

The 2017 volume also carried special reviews from a contemporary standpoint of influential books originally published decades ago, and which are now considered classics in regional studies (Fratesi, 2017a). The books were selected by involving established scholars with a broad perspective on evolving ideas. The reviews reflect on: how the books have contributed to changing the landscape of the discipline; little-known arguments and evidence; new concepts that were stimulated; any misinterpretations; and whether the books are still worth reading. Considerable thanks to those who accepted the challenge – the results are now brought together in a Virtual Special Issue (Fratesi, 2017b; available at [http://bit.ly/classic\\_books](http://bit.ly/classic_books)).

Towards the end of 2017, the journal and the RSA were pleased to award the 'best paper' in the 2016 volume to Jun Zhang and Jamie Peck for their article 'Variegated capitalism, Chinese style: Regional models, multi-scalar constructions'. This popular and influential piece (with almost 4000 views) contrasts conventional models of capitalist market economies with Chinese particularities, illustrated by examining a range of submodels of Chinese capitalism (Zhang & Peck, 2016).

The journal also acknowledges its debt to the hundreds of referees who provide valuable peer-review reports on submissions every year. The best referee awards for reviews in 2016 went to Andrea Caragliu (Politecnico di Milano), Neil Lee (London School of Economics and Political Science – LSE) and Jason Sorens (Dartmouth College, Hanover) for their exceptional service.

The year 2018 brings further changes to the journal. From the middle of the year, articles in the print issues will be published without their abstracts translated into other languages. In conjunction with the RSA, the journal has made the difficult decision to stop publishing these translations now that online translation tools make whole articles accessible to readers in any language.

The journal recently welcomed Lisa De Propriis (Birmingham) to the team as the new Policy Debates Editor, with considerable thanks to the outgoing editor Fiona Wishlade (Strathclyde). The Policy Debates section is a lively interdisciplinary forum for analysing policy and

practice issues in regional, local and urban development. Recent topics covered include European Union Cohesion Policy (Medeiros, 2017), the UK's Northern Powerhouse (Lee, 2017; Parr, 2017), greening regional development (Allan, McGregor, & Swales, 2017) and Brexit voting patterns (Los et al., 2017), while this issue includes a piece on place-based leadership (Bowden & Liddle, 2017). Authors interested in contributing to this section are invited to discuss their ideas with the Policy Debates Editor.

The 52nd (2018) volume of the journal will include a range of interesting special issues, general papers, Policy Debates and Urban and Regional Horizons. The editorial team hopes you will enjoy this selection and looks forward to receiving your own contributions to the development of theories and concepts, empirical analysis and policy deliberation in the field of regional studies.

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