

Note from the Editors

We start 2014 with a bumper issue of the *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies*. It contains one more article than usual and one of those is a magisterial survey of the state of, and prospects for, Regional Science by Gordon Mulligan, one of America's leading scholars in the field. The marriage of economics and geography in the sub-discipline of Regional Science is now 60 years old, so we've been around a long time. It is Gordon's theme, and one shared by myself and my co-editor colleague Sonya Glavac, that the subject and methodological foci of the past are likely to be modified, if not replaced, by others reflecting current economic and social concerns and imperatives. We now inhabit a multi-polar and increasingly globalised world beset by rapid change and huge uncertainty borne of complexity. And that complexity reflects declining capacities of governments to manage our affairs, but looming data and analytical inadequacies when we consider that our futures are likely to look very different to even the recent past. We therefore live, to mirror an ancient Chinese curse, in interesting times where, in the words of Jack Welch – former CEO of General Electric, “If the rate of change on the outside exceeds the rate of change on the inside, the end is near.” If we recognise the truth of this statement, Regional Science has a bright future in both analysing the changes occurring around us and assisting spatial transition to new and very different economic and social realities. It is therefore symbolic that this lead article marks the twentieth anniversary of the AJRS's founding. Let us use the occasion to rethink our field of study and reconfigure it for the start of the “Second Machine Age” heralded by Brynjolfsson and McAfee in their brilliant and recently published book of that title. We're in for a wild and exciting ride.

Gordon's analysis is mirrored in many ways by the various authors contributing to this edition. They collectively testify to the broadening of our research themes and the methodologies we adopt. Moreover, they also serve to differentiate Australia's regional concerns from those voiced in other parts of the world, and to demonstrate how this nation's vast distances, resource bounty, and sparse populations weigh on its problems and their resolution. Boyd Blackwell and Brian Dollery, for example, examine how remotely located minerals developments might be leveraged to build ‘enduring value’ for often economically and socially disadvantaged Aboriginal communities – indeed, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for those affected, but one where outcomes might easily fail to match expectations. Francine Rochford focuses on yet another theme of the moment for Australia, water management. Both Sonya and I

believe that this is one of the nation's critical management issues for the next 30 years, a time when global demand for food and fibre is expected by the UN FAO to rise by at least 50%. Agriculture could replicate the mining boom, but possibly only if the allocation and use of water in this country is sensitively and efficiently handled. Francine notes, however, that outcomes may depend on a raft of uncertain government financial strategies involving taxes, subsidies, use of market pricing mechanisms and so on. Comparisons with American strategies bring home these points nicely. Given that irrigation in Australia is spatially very uneven it follows that place prosperity could be greatly influenced by the settings chosen.

Peter Saunders and Melissa Wong address yet another issue of enduring concern, spatial variations in material deprivation and social exclusion. Indeed, Brynjolfsson and McAfee's diagnosis of likely widening social differentials in the "Second Machine Age" makes this article's concerns even more pressing. And its importance lies partly in deeper understanding of how the interrelated conditions of deprivation and exclusion come about. Without such understanding it is difficult for governments and indeed wider society to develop remedial strategies. The high spatial variability of petrol prices also exercises the minds of consumers, media and governments alike. So Abbas Valadkhani and his colleagues' work on petrol pricing should enthuse our readers, especially so the finding that high margins are not just found in rural areas. As a key economic input, it stands to reason that high prices in some locations are a likely drag on their economic prospects, though how to overcome them is a moot point in a market economy.

Our final two articles deal with an important theme rarely encountered in regional science, namely the geography of death. Ruth Williams and her colleagues examine spatial and temporal variations in Queensland's suicide rates and whether they reflect epidemiological or other causes, particularly issues of economic and social well-being including stress. In this respect, the authors' work adds another dimension to the analysis presented elsewhere in this issue by Peter Saunders and Melissa Wong on deprivation and social exclusion. Finally, Caroline Winter raises the timely issue of war memorialisation given the imminent centenary of the start of the First World War. Australia has a long history of honouring her war dead and important memorials can have regional economic significance. Caroline focuses, however, on one specific community, Ballarat, and what local people perceive as the importance of that city's memorials.

In short, we are pleased to present to our readers seven well-written and wide ranging articles that collectively chart some of the ways forward for the content and practice of Regional Science. We hope that they will enjoy the experience as much as we did putting this issue together.

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