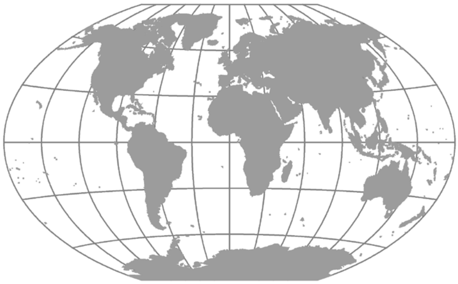
Book Review

Economic Geography and the Unequal Development of Regions. Jean-Claude Prager and Jacques-François Thisse. New York: Routledge, 2012. xii and 131 pp. US $120.00 hardcover (ISBN 978-0-415-52670-8).

Reviewed by Anne M. Meltzer, Department of Geography, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN.

Economic Geography and the Unequal Development of Regions seeks to discuss the major economic reasons for the stratification and variation of the spatial distribution of wealth. The role of cities and agglomerations are emphasized as vectors of economic development. The authors argue that the recent dropoff of the average global cost of transportation and communication is a main reason why economic development has been able to spread around the world to previously underdeveloped regions. Another recurring theme of this book is that, when looking at uneven development broadly, there is tremendous variation between regions. Therefore, there can be no blanket approach to apply homogenously to every region. Though each region requires a specialized approach to economic development, many of them share some of the same difficulties. Thus a book highlighting general solutions and approaches to solutions is an essential tool in the field of economic geography. Three approaches are discussed in this work: facts and theories of economic geography, long-term growth patterns and predictions, and application of economic theories to possible policy options. Empirical examples and theory are utilized to synthesize the existing literature on economic geography and development.

The innate variation of regional economies is perpetuated when the subject is approached from such a broad scale. Since each of these economies have certain factors in common, like Gross Domestic Product and Gross Domestic Product Rate of Increase, these



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values can be used as proxies of economic development. Of course these two indicators are not comprehensive enough to capture a snapshot of the economy of a region, but these concepts standardize economies and are thus used when the concept is approached from a broad scale.

What is beneficial to the global firm is beneficial to the region where that firm is located. The costs incurred by firms dictate where they will locate and thus whom their existence will benefit. It is also acknowledged, however, that not all activities can be available everywhere. How then, do Prager and Thisse suggest ways in which regions may develop? The notion of competition is the answer offered in response to this dilemma, but as this is not a novel concept, proposed policy to increase competition is necessary here. Essentially, the proposed solution is for lagging regions to imitate the practices and infrastructure of core regions in order to become more attractive to investment. This is neither a novel concept nor a realistically attainable goal for most lagging regions. Along the lines of this proposal, this book suggests different ways in which a lagging region can develop to imitate a more economically developed region in order to attract investment.

The notion of imitating other regions is troubling because of the diverse economic nature of each region. The authors acknowledge this but do little to imply which methods may be most appropriate for regions with varying levels of development. Intermittently throughout the book, the authors provide suggestions for lagging regions such as stating that "urban prescriptions and policies cannot ignore large differences in context" (82). These suggestions do not clarify the ambiguity that is regional economic development but add to the confusion by providing more indefinite guidelines for lagging regions. The arguments provided utilize circular reasoning and arrive at a conclusion not far removed from the original problem: policies should be implemented very carefully with consideration to specific situations. Being that this is a synthesis of existing literature, it can be deduced that through economic geography much can be theorized, but market forces are ultimately what will advance regions. The goal of economic geographers should therefore be to manipulate the environments in which market exchanges take place.

If a reader is looking to educate oneself on theoretical manipulation of market forces this book is an excellent resource. This book could also be a good resource for a regional entity which aims to adjust economic policy to resemble a similar, more successful region. Jean-Claude Prager is Chief Economist at the Greater Paris Corporation in France and has a background in mathematics and economics. Jacques-François Thisse is a renowned professor of Economics and Regional Science in Belgium and has an extensive background in economics, development, and industrial dynamics. This book is a volume in a collection of Studies in Global Competition published by Routledge, edited by John Cantwell and David Mowery.