



# ECONOMIC GEOGRAPHY

A CONTEMPORARY INTRODUCTION

THIRD EDITION

NEIL M. COE | PHILIP F. KELLY | HENRY W.C. YEUNG

WILEY Blackwell



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## A Contemporary Introduction

Third Edition

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# PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

Since the first edition of this book was published in 2007, some excellent student-oriented overviews of Economic Geography as a field have appeared. We believe, however, that the model developed for this textbook remains distinctive in several ways and we have retained these features in this third edition:

- First, the book is structured on the basis of topical issues that are tackled using a geographical perspective, rather than on the basis of intellectual history or academic debates. We believe this is still the best way to engage students, many of whom come to our courses with a curiosity about the world around them, but not necessarily a commitment to Geography as a discipline, or even any prior knowledge of the field.
- Second, the book is written in what we hope is a clear and engaging style. The writing should be accessible to first or second year university students, and we have tried to avoid overcrowding the text with citations. While the book's chapters are driven by geographical arguments and backed up with real-world examples, we have also tried to limit the empirical data and case studies to useful, rather than exhaustive, amounts of information.
- Third, although this is not a book about the global economy *per se*, we have made a deliberate effort to ensure that it addresses the major issues confronting the global economy today and it draws examples from around the world, reflecting the varied contexts in which the book is used. As such, we make little distinction between Economic Geography and the often-separate subfield of 'Development Geography'.
- Fourth, as the subtitle suggests, the book is deliberately contemporary. In addition to spending relatively little time reflecting on the history of Economic Geography as a field, we have also sought in every chapter to reflect the contemporary economy in which our students are living and working around the world. This has meant that the literature cited is also, for the most part, quite recent – where possible, dating from after 2010.

- Fifth, the book reflects the range of topical and theoretical approaches that exist in contemporary Economic Geography. Instructors will recognize that political–economic and institutional approaches underpin much of the book, but at the same time post-structural thinking and efforts to explore the economic implications of culture and identity are also taken seriously.

In short, this book aims to present a conceptually rich and yet readable introduction to the field of Economic Geography that showcases the different ways in which economic geographers understand economic processes. It is designed to appeal to students who are coming to Economic Geography for the first time, while also offering depth to those more familiar with the field.

## Changes in the Third Edition

This edition retains many of the changes introduced for the second edition (including, for example, the chapter on financial geographies). We have, however, made a number of changes:

- We have slightly modified the language used to describe geographical concepts in Chapter 1 (which itself develops an entirely new case study of bottled water). Our geographical concepts are now presented as: spatial patterns; the distinctiveness of place; connections across space; and territorial power. Scale is then introduced as a concept that cuts across these other themes. We have also sought to ensure that these themes thread through all of the subsequent chapters so that students can see how geographical concepts work when applied to many different questions.
- Our chapter on labour, which previously emphasized the strategies and impacts of organized labour (reflecting the origins of Labour Geography as a field), has shifted to focus on the role of migrant workers. We use the increasing dependence on disenfranchised migrant labour around the world to (re)think about the increasing precarity of work in general, the regulation of labour markets and workplaces, new forms of labour organizing, and the migration industry as an economic sector in its own right.
- We have created a new chapter on international organizations, reflecting on the ways in which the global economy and global development are institutionalized and governed. This has two benefits. First, the existing chapter on the state is now able to focus more closely on national state roles and strategies, which integrates literatures on neoliberalism, the developmental state, and ‘varieties of capitalism’. Second, the new chapter allows us to engage with issues of global development more explicitly by examining the institutional forms through which it is fostered.

- We have replaced the second edition's chapter on the environment, which provided a general overview of the commodification of nature, with a new chapter on the economic geographies of global climate change. This chapter retains some features of the old environment chapter, but addresses key areas of concern in relation to climate change. These include: uneven patterns of carbon emissions and economic impacts; programs to control emissions such as taxation and trading schemes; and the geographical implications of a greener or post-carbon economy.
- Two pairs of chapters from the previous edition have been combined. First, the previously separate chapters on gender and ethnicity have been merged into a single chapter on identities, asking the question 'are economic geographies gendered and racialized?' Combining these two themes allows us to address the issue of intersectional identities, reflecting the widely recognized argument that the impacts of embodied identity in workplaces and labour markets are not necessarily separable into distinctly gendered and racialized forms. Second, the previous chapters on retailing and consumption have been brought together to allow us to look at the interplay between the forces that shape the delivery of goods and services and different modes of consumption. These interactions, of course, take on varied forms in different places and territories.
- We have added more coverage of the diverse/community economies literature, reflecting on practices that exist outside the capitalist mainstream. This material appears in numerous chapters, where issues such as informal retailing, Islamic finance, community-based development, and domestic/reproductive labour are discussed. But it is also brought together towards the end of the book in a new chapter (Chapter 14). This allows instructors to end their courses with a reflection on how students might themselves engage in alternative economic practices in their daily lives.
- Finally, data, examples, and references have been extensively updated throughout. Nearly every example and case study has been thoroughly revised or replaced in order to reflect contemporary patterns in the economy at all scales. Where possible, the latest data from the period 2015–2018 have been included. We have also sought to reflect contemporary research themes in the field of Economic Geography, including, for example, evolutionary economic geography, financialization, diverse economies, and feminist political economy.

## Audience

The book is designed for introductory courses on Economic Geography in an undergraduate degree programme. The text is written in an accessible way, but some of the processes and ideas that it discusses are inevitably complicated. The ways in which the text is used will therefore depend on instructors' assessments

of their students' background and preparation. Students who already have some familiarity with the concepts and arguments presented in this book could likely use the chapters as their starting point for further exploration of a given topic through articles from the research literature in Economic Geography, including those suggested in the reading notes for each chapter. But for those with little background in Geography (or cognate social sciences), the chapters in this book might be better approached through an initial reading pitched at a popular audience, for instance, from a news magazine or website. In other words, the chapters in this book may be the starting point or the end point, depending on the students involved. The book is designed so that it could serve either purpose.

While the pitch of this book is intended for a particular audience, it is also worth noting that a specific conception of what constitutes Economic Geography is implicit in our selection and treatment of topics. The text is therefore targeted to those instructors who share, or wish to adopt, this approach. A few points are worth making in this regard:

- First, this is a book that explores the multiple scales of economic processes and is not, therefore, focused exclusively on larger processes at global or national scales. For example, we believe that Economic Geography has as much to contribute in thinking about how gender roles in the household play out within the spaces of the urban labour market, as it does in understanding the globalizing organizational forms and production networks of transnational corporations (and so we cover both).
- Second, ours is a largely qualitative vision of the field, in the sense that we do not emphasize formal analytical techniques in the book. Rather than providing exercises in quantitative analysis, we focus instead on stimulating students with critical perspectives and arguments. For example, in thinking about ethnically structured labour markets, we are more interested in inviting students to think about the processes that lie behind such phenomena than in explaining how to demonstrate statistically that such patterns exist. That said, statistical exercises can, of course, be used as supplementary assignments alongside this text.
- Third, we focus on what we see as some of the best of recent scholarship in Economic Geography. Although some classic models and theoretical approaches are covered, our goal is to expose students to the insights that *contemporary* Economic Geography can provide in making sense of the world around them.
- Fourth, we do not seek to establish impervious boundaries between Economic Geography and other cognate fields concerned with social, cultural, and political processes. Our vision of the discipline is a porous one and we take seriously the need to view the economy as embedded in other spheres of life. For example, we see consumption not 'just' as an economic act but also a political engagement through fair trade and other certified products, and as a component of identity formation. In this sense, the book is very much in tune with what geographers have called the 'new economic geography' (not to be



confused with the approaches in Economics that are often given the same label). The audience for this book is, then, among those who share this ecumenical vision of Economic Geography.

## Organization of the Book

This book takes the form of a series of linked chapters on topical issues and contemporary debates that draw upon, and showcase, some of the best research in Economic Geography. These issues are drawn from contemporary economic life, which is increasingly constituted at a global scale – from uneven development, climate change, and transnational corporations, to migrant labour and ethnic economies. We see each of these as issues rather than just phenomena, i.e. they are processes to be debated rather than factual realities to be described. Each chapter thus seeks to answer a significant contemporary question that a curious and well-informed reader might reasonably be expected to ask about the world around them.

This, then, is not a conventional text: our aim is to develop well-grounded *arguments* from an Economic Geography perspective, not necessarily to present simplifications of multiple viewpoints or collections of facts and data. We are, however, trying to develop these arguments in straightforward and accessible ways.

The book is organized into five parts:

**Part I: Conceptual Foundations** – This section introduces the basic building blocks of geographical analysis and core ideas that underpin our understanding of the economy. Chapter 1 examines spatial patterns, the distinctiveness of place, and connections across space and territorial power as core geographical concepts, with scale intersecting across all of them. Chapter 2 explores where the idea of ‘the economy’ comes from historically and some of the common concepts used in economic analysis such as demand, supply, production, markets, and firms. Chapter 3 then mobilizes these geographical and economic concepts into a dynamic and structural account of uneven development in a capitalist economy. Taking one step down from these structural ideas, Chapter 4 introduces the concept of the network to bring together the actors and activities that connect the global economy together.

**Part II: Key Economic Actors** – Here, we break down the larger systemic processes addressed in Part I and tackle four major components of nearly all economic processes: firms; workers; consumers; and capital. Chapter 5 takes on the transnational corporation. Although firms come in many forms and sizes, the TNC plays a disproportionate role in shaping the global economic landscape and we will ask how the work of organizing global production is done in practice. Chapter 6 examines labour, which also comes in many forms, but here too we focus on its transnational manifestation in the form of migrant workers. Chapter 7 examines consumers and the process of consumption, noting the uneven spatial patterns of consumption, its organization through the changing retail sector, and the role of

place in shaping consumption. In Chapter 8 we turn to capital and examine how the financial sector works, how it has created concentrations of power in financial centres, and how ‘financialization’ is shaping the economic landscape.

**Part III: Governing the Economy** – This section addresses the ways in which the economy is organized not by the ‘invisible hand’ of the market mechanism, but by institutions that shape and regulate economic actors and processes. Chapter 9 discusses the ways in which the state organizes economic activities, both within and across its borders. The account of the state also notes diverse state forms and strategies across the world, and the varied forms of capitalism associated with them. Chapter 10 takes the discussion to the scale of international organizations and examines how they shape global economic activity. Here, we also turn explicitly to the question of development, asking how programs of global poverty reduction are organized by diverse institutions. Chapter 11 focuses on a very specific form of national and international state involvement in the economy – relating to the mitigation and impacts of global climate change. The chapter goes well beyond state regulation, but a key part of the discussion concerns various emission-reduction strategies and impacts.

**Part IV: Social and Cultural Dimensions** – The final part of the book explores the blurred line between economic processes and the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Chapter 12 highlights the very social process of economic cluster formation, and the benefits of learning and innovation that result. Chapter 13 asks how economic processes are shaped by the gendered and racialized identities that individuals bring to workplaces, labour markets, and enterprises. In Chapter 14 we examine how individuals and communities can decide to create economic practices that are quite different from the mainstream of market transactions, capitalist firms, waged labour, and private property. In particular, they may have very different motivations and objectives than simply accruing profits. The agency of individual economic actors, and their ability to reshape their economic world, is a prominent feature of the alternative models that we describe.

**Part V: Conclusion** – In concluding the book, Chapter 15 takes a rather different direction, and focuses on the thinkers, intellectual paradigms, and societal contexts that have shaped the history of Economic Geography. Having deliberately avoided an explicit review of the field for most of the book, here we pull back the curtain, so to speak, for students interested in how Economic Geography has changed over time in response to social and political circumstances.

## Pedagogical Strategies

Each chapter in this book follows a similar structure. In most cases the chapter title is worded as a fairly intuitive question, reflecting our attempt to engage with queries that students might have of their own economic worlds. Although the

topic for each chapter also lends itself to coverage of a defined field within Economic Geography, we have deliberately avoided framing chapters in disciplinary terms in this way.

The chapters open with what we call the ‘hook’, which is a (hopefully engaging) contemporary example or issue used to introduce the key theme of the chapter. In the second section we tackle a commonly held myth or misapprehension about the topic at hand (e.g. the nation state is now powerless, or transnational corporations are all-powerful) and illustrate how these myths often rest, in large part, on a non-geographical understanding of the world around us. The main body of each chapter then serves to illustrate the necessity and effectiveness of taking an explicitly geographical approach for understanding different aspects of the economy.

Our aim is to make these arguments in a clearly understandable, lightly referenced, jargon-free manner, drawing on a wide range of examples from across different sectors of the economy, and from around the world. Boxes within the text are labelled as ‘key concepts’, ‘case studies’, and ‘further thinking’, and they offer more detailed elaborations on specific ideas or examples.

The penultimate section of each chapter is designed to add a ‘twist’ to the arguments that have preceded it; or, in other words, to probe somewhat more deeply into the complexity of contemporary economic geographies. Additional nuances and insights are offered in these twists to encourage students to avoid simplistic views of economic processes. Each chapter then concludes with a short summary of the main themes covered.

What lies after the summary is also important. First, for ease of use, the reference list is included on a chapter-by-chapter basis. Second, the reading notes in each chapter guide the student towards what we identify as the most engaging and accessible literature on the topic. Some of these readings identify the sources of well-known case studies we have drawn from the geographical literature, enabling students to ‘flesh out’ the brief summaries offered in the chapter. It is important to note, however, that the references or further readings that are cited are not intended to be comprehensive guides to the literature. There is a great deal of valuable work being done in Economic Geography that is not cited in our chapters. Beyond the academic literature, we also identify some online resources that can be used to supplement the information and arguments in the chapter.

Overall, our intention is to offer an exploration of Economic Geography rich in examples and case studies that can, on the one hand, expose students to economic life and practices in various parts of the world, and, at the same time, introduce concepts that can be ‘put to work’ in their own local contexts. Hence, the text can be integrated with local literature and case studies wherever the book is used.

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Like the two that preceded it, this third edition has been a long time in the making! Throughout the writing process, however, we have been continually motivated by the positive feedback and encouragement of users and readers of the earlier versions. We hope that this new edition meets their expectations, and provides a student-friendly window onto the distinctive perspective that Economic Geography offers on our turbulent world. This third edition has benefitted from the cumulative comments and feedback of innumerable people – proposal reviewers, manuscript reviewers, and both faculty and student users – since we started this journey back in 2003. We would like especially to thank the seven anonymous reviewers who commented on the proposal for this third edition and helped us to sharpen our lines of thinking. We would also like to once again acknowledge our collective debt to Peter Dicken for inspiring us to work together to enhance the accessibility and visibility of Economic Geography.

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