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Towards the new economic geography in the brain power society

Masahisa Fujita

Institute of Economic Research, Kyoto University, Yoshida-Honmachi, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto, 606-8501, Japan

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Abstract

This article proposes the further development of the New Economic Geography towards a comprehensive theory of spatial economics in the age of brain power society, in which the dynamics of spatial economy arise from the dual linkages in the economic and knowledge fields.
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1. Welcome to the brain power society

In my recent trip to Jyväskylä in Finland, I happened to find an interesting advertisement in a free booklet provided at my hotel.[1] The advertisement placed by the Øresund Region in Sweden called for high-tech firms. It is a simple one-page advertisement with a photograph of a smiling biochemist, together with the following two sentences:

> "The Bad News: The brain is the only natural resource in the Øresund Region.
> The Good News: The brain is the only natural resource that expands with use."

This is very much in contrast with the traditional regional advertisements (which tend to emphasize the usual economic features such as low wages, low taxes and transportation accessibility), as it focuses on the single most important resource for creative activity.

E-mail address: fujita@kier.kyoto-u.ac.jp.
[1] Structural Change in Europe 2 - new northern knowledge, Hagbath Publisher, May 2002, p.22.

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The topic on stimulating creative sectors of society brings to mind another interesting article by Fairclough (2004) entitled "Gay Asia: Tolerance Pays," which reports about the increasing acceptance of gay rights in Asian countries. In particular, it features about the annual *Gay Nation Party* in Singapore (held to coincide with *Singapore Nation Day* in August), where 8000 gay men from all over the world gather and dance to pulsing house music and laser lights, whipping off their shirts. A party organizer wears a T-shirt that proclaims.

"Choose Sin Gapore"

This is a scene unimaginable a few years ago in Singapore, known as a rigid and highly-regulated city state, where persons caught with mere possession of chewing gum risked arrest.

According to Gordon Fairclough, the driving force behind Singapore's more relaxed attitude towards homosexuality reflects a broader government strategy to open up the ideas-driven economy and to tap potential creative resources,. In fact, this new strategy of the Singapore government is supported by a recent study by Richard Florida and Gary Gates (2001) in the US, which reports that a city's openness to gay communities is a good indicator of the city's capacity for embracing diverse people, one of the essential ingredients of a creative community that spurs the transformation of a successful high-tech city. Indeed, the high-tech capital of the world, San Francisco (where Silicon Valley is), is also well known as the gay capital of the world, where nearly 700,000 gay men and women gather for the *Pride Parade* each year.

Welcome to the "brain power society" or "C-society." According to Lester Thurow at MIT, advanced countries are shifting from the capitalism based on mass production of commodities to the *brain power society* in which creation of knowledge and information using brain power plays the central role (Thurow, 1996). The concept of a brain power society is essentially the same as that of the *C-society* advocated by Åke Andersson who maintains that advanced countries are leaving the industrial society (with its reliance on simplicity of production and products and the heavy use of natural resources and energy), and entering the C-society with and increasing reliance on creativity, communication capacity, and complexity of products (Anderson, 1985). In this essay, the term "brain power society" is taken to be synonymous with the "C-society" of Åke Anderson.

The ultimate concern of this essay is the further development of the *New Economic Geography* (NEG) towards a more comprehensive theory of geographical economics in the age of brain power society, in which the dynamics of the spatial economy arise from the dual linkages in the economic and knowledge fields. Before elaborating this ultimate objective, let me review briefly what is the so called the New Economic Geography.

2. The New Economic Geography and its future: incorporating dual linkages in economic and knowledge fields

As is well-known, since about 1990 there has been a renaissance of theoretical and empirical work on economic geography. Among others, the pioneering work of Paul Krugman (1991) on the core-periphery model has triggered a new flow of interesting contributions to economic geography. The work represented by this new school of economics is called the New Economic Geography (NEG).[2]

[2] See Fujita et al. (1999) for a comprehensive manifestation of this approach. See also Fujita and Thisse (2002) and Baldwin et al. (2003) for recent developments in NEG. For an overview of NEG, see also Fujita and Krugman (2004), Fujita (2005), and Fujita and Mori (2005).

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