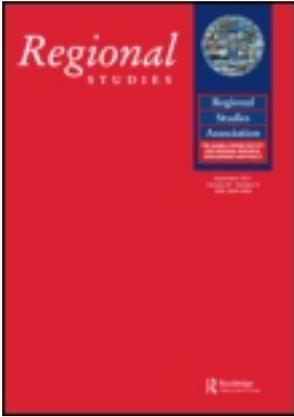


## Regional Studies



**Spaces of International Economy and Management:  
Launching New Perspectives on Management and  
Geography**

Claes G. Alvstam  
University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden  
Version of record first published: 03 Sep 2012.

**To cite this article:** Claes G. Alvstam (2012): Spaces of International Economy and Management: Launching New Perspectives on Management and Geography, *Regional Studies*, 46:9, 1274-1275

**To link to this article:**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.722368>

Spaces of International Economy and Management: Launching New Perspectives on Management and Geography, ROLF D. SCHLUNZE, NATHANIEL O. AGOLA and WILLIAM W. BABER (Eds), Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012. xxiii + 357 pp. US\$105.00 (hbk). ISBN 978 0 230 30022 4.

The corporate-level approach has had surprisingly great difficulties in taking root in the discipline of economic geography. Despite several promising initiatives in the past to establish the firm as an important object in geographical studies (for example, DE SMIDT and WEVER, 1990; DICKEN and MALMBERG, 2001; KRUMME, 1969; LAULAJAINEN and STAFFORD, 1995; OINAS, 1995, 1997; PELLENBARG and WEVER, 2008; SCHOENBERGER, 1999), and provoking suggestions of the immediate demise of corporate geography (for example, WALKER, 1989), economic geographers have mainly been reluctant to leave the safe haven of global–national–regional–local-level studies in order to explore the much more complex and blurry patterns of transnational activities of manufacturing and services enterprises and their spatial behaviour. One important reason for this relative ignorance has been the obvious restriction to explore the concepts of space and distance from the firm level, due to lack of suitable secondary data, particularly at the cross-border level, requiring extensive surveys and face-to-face interviews, in order to grasp and interpret why the company has chosen a certain geographical profile of its business activities, and if space has mattered on the whole when it has come to location decisions and the formulation of a grand global management strategy. The rapid development of fragmentation and specialization within the framework of global and regional production networks, in what has been labelled ‘the second unbundling’ of manufacturing activities, has contributed to the need to form a better understanding of the spatial behaviour of the firm, preferably together with neighbouring disciplines, which have shared the geographers’ reluctance to come to grips with what could be called ‘geography of international business’. The mainstream international business literature, as well as in international strategic management, has since long touched upon these matters, (for example, BUCKLEY and GHAURI, 2004; JOHANSON and VAHLNE, 1977, 2009; PORTER, 1990), but the serious attempts to bridge the gap between two adjacent but nevertheless between themselves remote traditions have been scarce.

Therefore, it is a welcome initiative by a group of scholars with a background in economic geography, but with present affiliations to business school education and research, to assume the challenge to revitalize the ‘geography-of-the-firm’ tradition by compiling a number of different approaches to ‘management geography’. The concept itself implies a shift of focus from the geographical pattern of corporate activities to a more actor-centred perspective with a systematic scrutiny of

if and how space matters in management and organization theories and practices. The three editors, professors Rolf Schlunze, Nathaniel Agola and William Baber, are all based at Japanese management schools, and the collection of contributions reflects accordingly a geographical focus on Japan, even though there are a number of examples from other parts of the world as well. The emphasis on Japan can be seen as a merit of the book, rather than a matter of concern. As Henry Yeung points out in an elegant Foreword to the anthology, in which he sketches a couple of challenges for the field of management geography, space and spatial relations remain largely under-theorized in mainstream management and organization theories, which is a reflection of their predominant Anglo-American origin.

The following eighteen contributions deal with various highly important issues, which all aim at providing for a better understanding of decision-making in international firms, for example, how 'hybrid' managers create cross-cultural synergy, the locational preferences of the 'mobile elite', how managers with divergent cultural norms contribute to the internationalization of business networks, how the US educational background shapes Japanese legal professionals, the development of global managerial practices, and the introduction of the term 'space oddity', in order to highlight the lack of more holistic and thereby a more realistic concept of firms' decision-making related to space. Another group of articles deals with the locational environment in itself, ranging from the network of global cities through restructuring at the regional level to survival strategies of local industries. As can be expected, the quality and relevance of the various contributions are uneven, and the compound result can be seen as an ambitious attempt to establish an agenda for research, rather than providing a coherent and complete framework for management geography as a relevant study-field in the interspace between international strategic management and economic geography. In this respect, the anthology at hand fulfils an important mission, and the editors, as well as the contributors, should be encouraged to continue to explore further opportunities to abridge this gap.

CLAES G. ALVSTAM

University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

© 2012, CLAES G. ALVSTAM

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.722368>

## REFERENCES

- BUCKLEY P. J. and GHAURI P. (2004) Globalisation, economic geography and the strategy of multinational enterprises', *Journal of International Business Studies*, 35, pp. 81–98.
- DE SMIDT M. and WEVER E. (Eds) (1990) *The Corporate Firm in a Changing World Economy*. Routledge, London.
- DICKEN P. and MALMBERG A. (2001) Firms in territories: a relational perspective. *Economic Geography* 77, 345–364.

- JOHANSON J. and VAHLNE J.-E. (1977) The internationalization process of the firm: a model of knowledge development and increasing foreign market commitment. *Journal of International Business Studies* 8(1), 23–32.
- JOHANSON J. and VAHLNE J.-E. (2009) The Uppsala internationalization process model revised – from liability of foreignness to liability of outsidership. *Journal of International Business Studies* 40(9), 1411–1431.
- KRUMME G. (1969) Towards a geography of enterprise, *Economic Geography* 45(1), 30–40.
- LAULAJAINEN R. and STAFFORD H. A. (1995) *Corporate Geography: Business Location Principles and Cases*. Kluwer, Dordrecht.
- OINAS P. (1995) Organisations and environments: linking industrial geography and organisation theory, in CONTI S., MALECKI E. J. and OINAS P. (Eds) *The Industrial Enterprise and its Environment: Spatial Perspectives*, pp. 143–167. Avebury, Aldershot.
- OINAS P. (1997) On the socio-spatial embeddedness of business firms. *Erdkunde* 51(1), 23–32.
- PELLENBARG P. and WEVER E. (Eds) (2008) *International Business Geography: Case Studies of Corporate Firms*. Routledge, London.
- PORTER M. E. (1990) *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. Free Press, New York, NY.
- SCHOENBERGER E. (1999) The firm in the region and the region in the firm, in BARNES T. J. and GERTLER M. (Eds) *The New Industrial Geography: Regions, Regulation and Institutions*, pp. 209–224. Routledge, London.
- WALKER R. (1989) A requiem for corporate geography: new directions in industrial organization, the production of place and uneven development, *Geografiska Annaler* 71B (1), 43–68.