

Foreword

Finland Futures Research Centre and Finland Futures Academy organised an international conference in June 2006 under the title “Changing Foresight Practices in Regional Development – Global Pressures and Regional Possibilities” in collaboration with Economic Geography, Pan-European Institute and Pori Unit of the Turku School of Economics. This *Fennia* Special Issue “Foresight and Innovation in Regional Development” publishes a selection of papers presented in the conference.

The conference brought together people from the public sector and various research organisations and business corporations. The objective was to share and discuss new ideas concerning regional development and globalisation, and generate multidisciplinary and productive discussions from different scientific and institutional backgrounds. There were some 180 participants from 24 countries giving 43 presentations in twelve workshops and seven poster presentations. The conference was partitioned into seven thematic sessions as follows:

- Innovation systems in the creative economy
- Strategies for the globalising economy
- Practical applications (case studies)
- Theories of foresight and regional development
- Foresight methods in regional development
- The future of regional and global governance
- The changing roles and impacts of companies, universities and public actors in regional development

Some 15 to 20 years ago, in the wake of the rise of information and knowledge society, one of the mantras of the discourse was that this evolution would dramatically reduce the significance of space and place. An attitude emerged that geography had turned archaic, that distance had become irrelevant and place was insignificant in the contemporary society. These prophecies have, however, proved premature. In the EU policy, for example, regions have their special agendas e.g., DG Regions, Committee of Regions in EU Parliament, special funding programs for regions in framework

programs and structural funds, etc. In Finland and Europe as a whole, the increasing concentration of people and economic activities in a relatively small number of metropolitan areas has raised concern among ordinary people as well as in politicians. In academic communities, multidisciplinary research interest towards areas, regions and territories is lively and growing.

Questions and problems concerning regions cannot be solved by single organisation or by regional governmental organisations. There is a quest for collaboration and co-operation of regional stakeholders within networks of regional development and innovation. Universities and other educational institutions play an important role in this work together with private companies, governmental organisations and the civil society. Furthermore, multi-disciplinary approach is essential in carrying out this challenging task.

The papers in this Special Issue demonstrate the large variety of approaches connected to regional development and foresight, as well as the complexity and interconnectivity of the world we live in. Examples from Russia, Ireland, Latin America and Finland demonstrate how people far apart are faced with similar questions and problems. The answers and solutions naturally vary from region to region, but in the globalised world, regions are surprisingly similar. This notion makes us ask if we indeed are imprisoned in a common iron cage of global economy.

We wish to thank the editorial board of *Fennia* for this opportunity to publish selected conference papers in this classical and distinguished journal, and hope that this special issue of *Fennia* serves as a mind opening reading experience for those interested in regional development. Our warmest thanks go also to the authors as well as to the expert reviewers of the manuscripts.

In Turku, 19 January 2007

Juha Kaskinen and Riikka Saarimaa,
Guest Editors