Preface

Much of the literature and debate in the social sciences and amongst policy-makers over the last decade has been on understanding service-based economies, neglecting manufacturing and its effects on the economy. The financial crisis that commenced in 2008 has been associated with political debates that revolve around the ‘real’ economy and a call for rebalancing regional and national economies. The use of the term ‘real’ highlights the production of tangible goods rather than intangible services or even various forms of fictitious and financial capital. Over the last decade or so, manufacturing has been transformed but academic understanding has not kept pace with these alterations. Many of these alterations revolve around the development of new forms of expertise-driven manufacturing, new geographies of production, jobless growth, the development of hybrid products and hybridized production services that combine services and manufacturing tasks in novel ways, and new forms of financialization applied to manufacturing. These ongoing transformations suggest that it is timely to explore the development of a new geography of manufacturing and even to unravel the evolving geographies of manufacturing that have emerged since the ‘crisis of Fordism’ in the 1970s.

This interdisciplinary volume provides a critical and multi-disciplinary review of current manufacturing processes, practices and policies, and broadens our understanding of production and innovation in the world economy. Chapters highlight how firms and industries modify existing processes to produce for established and emerging markets through dynamic and design-driven strategies. This approach allows readers to view transformations in production systems and processes across sectors, technologies and industries. Contributors include scholars ranging from engineering to policy to economic geography. This collection demonstrates that manufacturing continues to matter in developed market economies as in emerging economies. It is important to appreciate the existence of varieties of capitalism or variegated capitalism but that manufacturing is also variegated in place and across space. In this context, it is important to appreciate place-based manufacturing differences as well as the role that trans-local or ‘global’ production relationships play in the production of manufactured products and hybrid products.

This book highlights contributions that critically engage in understanding manufacturing and production. It brings together chapters that explore the dynamics of manufacturing theoretically and empirically to advance debates and understanding of manufacturing from pre- to post-industrial worlds. The book also develops conversations between different but often unrelated debates in economic geography, for example manufacturing and financialization, manufacturing and creative work, manufacturing and logistics, and manufacturing and consumption. Chapters examine topics including theory and methods as well as theoretically grounded empirical analysis of production processes, pre and post production (from raw materials to marketing, design and consumption, including embedded services and supporting services), factors of production, financialization, and the growing policy debates about how to shape and sustain manufacturing in the 21st century world economy.
Particularly in light of the renewed policy interest in manufacturing as a core component of national and regional export strategies, there are targeted policy efforts underway to support manufacturing in advanced industrialized economies. A stated goal of these new policy initiatives is to ‘push innovation down the supply chain’ to create localized competitive advantage by combining production and innovation capacities. In a global economy often defined by the complexity or extent of its geographically distributed supply networks, such a policy priority requires a precise and nuanced understanding of the current state of manufacturing and its shifting dynamics. As this volume illustrates, that understanding is embedded in an interdisciplinary empirical approach to manufacturing processes that spans the social sciences, engineering and policy disciplines. It is our goal for this volume both to inform readers about the realities of manufacturing in the world economy and to make the case for the ongoing support of such critical, interdisciplinary research.