Preface

When we were approached to edit this *Handbook on the Geographies of Innovation* our first reaction was that there are already many similar volumes out there. However, on second thought, we saw this as an opportunity to explore some of the more recent and exciting ideas about the geography of innovation, ideas that question the paradigm established in the 1980s and which still structures much of the discourse about innovation and its geography today.

Indeed, the selection of chapters and authors in this book stems from our feeling that there has been lock-in within the 'geography of innovation' community, and there may therefore be a need for path renewal. Seminal work of the 1980s – emerging in a time of industrial crisis, in the pre-internet age, and in an era of only hesitant globalization and neoliberalization – is still shaping the way we think about innovation, regions, proximity and knowledge flows today. Many of the same eminent scholars who developed these ideas are still actively involved in developing and promoting them, and have trained a new generation of scholars who are refining and extending them. These ideas – many of which focus on regions, local interactions, clusters, and which situate the prerogative to innovate in a context of global competition between national economies – remain valid today and are represented in this collection. The ideas are being modified and extended incrementally, and are becoming more complex and nuanced.

However, their dominance has tended to stifle alternative views of the geography of innovation, of its purpose (rarely questioned), and indeed of its local and global impacts (rarely considered beyond the fact that it is believed to increase global productivity). Many of today's dominant ideas have been developed in a Western, indeed in a North European, context, and have been imported somewhat uncritically into different geographic contexts such as Canada, Australia (which remain Western), India and China. They have also been applied to sparse regions and suburban localities where alternative views of how firms innovate, how knowledge is acquired, and what the purpose of innovation is are necessary. Finally, they have not always taken into account new ways of conceptualizing geographic space (such as that articulated by Doreen Massey in her 2005 book *For Space*), nor the problematic concepts of 'region' and 'location', which are becoming increasingly fuzzy as individuals, communities and firms become more mobile (across diverse distances and timescales) and interconnected.

The chapters that have been selected should be seen as an unrepresentative sample of some of the more established views and approaches to the geography of innovation, and of some of the newer and more unorthodox ones. We recognize that the volume remains oriented towards a Western (or Global North) perspective, and we can only hope that the new ideas and processes that are being developed and observed in other parts of the world will also gain a wider audience and provoke debate and reflection about the role of, reason for and geographic patterns of innovation. Our inability to reach much beyond Western (or Global North) scholars with respect to chapters in this volume reflects the limits of our networks, and the fact that even in a world of global connectedness culture,

language and distance continue to play a role in the creation, exchange and diffusion of ideas.

We hope that the juxtaposition of chapters in this volume will lead to debate and dialogue between scholars – that those more embedded in prevailing paradigms will consider some of the newer arguments, and that those forging ahead with new ideas and observations will take stock of the important knowledge and understanding of the geographies of innovation that have been built up since the 1980s. If there is to be path renewal in our understanding of the geographies of innovation, such open dialogue and mutual acknowledgement and respect for both established and more recent ideas and empirical work are a prerequisite.

We are very grateful to all the authors who have contributed their time and expertise to this volume. We are also grateful to our colleagues and families for allowing us the time to work on this collection: whilst editing a handbook has a more managerial flavour than writing a monograph, the time and effort involved are not dissimilar. Finally, we would like to thank the editors at Edward Elgar, Matthew Pitman in particular, for having entrusted us with this project and for having supported us during the process.

Richard Shearmur, Christophe Carrincazeaux and David Doloreux