
Preface

INNOVATION refers to both the process of producing and diffusing something that is new, useful, and valuable in economic life, and the outcome or product of this process. The word itself, originally having had negative connotations, being regarded almost as a heresy, was transformed into a virtue with the acceleration of modernity. Future historians, looking back at the 20th and early 21st century, may well refer to this turbulent and prolific time period as an era defined and driven by innovation. Yet, at present, we would likely be more cautious with our judgment. Part of this may be caused by the fact that innovation has become a rather fashionable term that is used in many different contexts, ranging from 'innovative thinking' to 'social innovation' and 'innovative governance'. It is often assumed that innovation is decisive in strengthening the competitiveness of economies, and because of this it is sailing on a wave of support from policymakers, widely publicized by the media. This gives the impression that innovation is everywhere and that governments around the world are unpacking 'secret weapons' against unemployment and decline. However, many cities, regions and countries suffer from stagnation and ever growing economic and social disparities. In reality, many firms and organizations are struggling to find innovative solutions to fulfill their missions and keep their workforce employed while facing accelerated environmental changes. In current discourses of managers and policymakers, innovation is too often used as a 'black box' that merely serves the purpose of invocation, if not incantation. Considering this inflationary and sometimes presumptuous use of the term for anything that is novel, or expected to be novel, we believe it is time to scrutinize what we know about and how we understand the processes and contexts of innovation and knowledge creation.

The Elgar Companion to Innovation and Knowledge Creation provides a comprehensive overview and critical evaluation of existing conceptualizations and discusses new developments in and challenges to innovation research. The companion suggests that innovation, learning, knowledge creation and creativity are processes that are closely linked and need to be analyzed in an integrated fashion. It also points to the risks of oversimplifying and overgeneralizing complex processes that need to be understood within rich contexts, through multiple lenses, and at different scopes and scales.

This edited volume explores a wide variety of related topics in eight parts. These cover different concepts and understandings of innovation (Part I), the role and impact of institutions (Part II), linkages with knowledge and creativity (Part III), fundamentals of networks and communities (Part IV), innovation in permanent spatial settings (Part V), innovation in temporary and virtual settings (Part VI), related entrepreneurship and market-making processes (Part VII), and issues of governance and management of innovation (Part VIII). As such, this companion fundamentally draws on inter- and trans-disciplinary views of innovation ranging from economics and geography to management, political science and sociology. It draws together a large unique group of leading innovation researchers from across these disciplines and also echoes new voices in the field. In many ways, this group of researchers has tried to build a cognitive platform for

multidisciplinary debate; one that, in turn, can enrich the research process in each of these disciplines.

Having put together and orchestrated the contents of this companion, we believe that the final result not only gives a broad and up-to-date overview of the field but also discusses and develops new perspectives that will help to find answers and inspirations for solving some of the pressing economic challenges of our time. Due to its cross-disciplinary perspective, this companion can be utilized as a reference book for researchers, practitioners and policymakers, as well as students across the social sciences who are interested in innovation studies. It can also serve as a sourcebook for lectures and seminars focusing on innovation, innovation economics and innovation policy.

This companion could have not been conceptualized and finalized without the support of many colleagues and friends, and myriads of discussions with them over the past years. Together we have experienced an innovative journey: the outcome was hardly predictable and its making involved many ups and downs, with pleasant surprises, unforeseeable events, and sometimes necessary adjustments. We would like to thank all the authors who have supported this edited volume. In preparing and copy-editing the companion manuscript and its individual chapters, we relied heavily on support from David Adams, Michaela Doyle, Daniel Hutton Ferris and Yi-wen Zhu, who did a terrific job. The project was also supported by Alex O'Connell, Alex Pettifer and, particularly, Matt Pitman from Edward Elgar Publishing, who showed tremendous patience with our many delays. We would also like to warmly thank our colleagues, students and collaborators for raising many relevant issues with respect to innovation and always challenging us to develop our arguments further. None of this would have been possible without the support of our loved ones, for which we are most grateful. We believe that the outcome clearly reflects the broad trust and sense of collective endeavor that drove this project from day one.

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