
Since the financial crash of 2007/08, there has been a burgeoning interest amongst academics and policy makers alike in why some economies prove to be more resilient to shocks and crises than others. This has led to a rapidly expanding literature exploring both the concept of economic resilience (see Martin and Sunley, 2016) as well as reporting the findings of various studies seeking to identify what factors confer greater levels of resilience to particular shocks.

In this book, Baycan and Pinto bring together a collection of seventeen discrete chapters that add to this literature, broadly exploring the link between resilience, crisis, and innovation dynamics. The role of innovation in promoting resilience is coming under increasing scrutiny at present (Bristow and Healy, 2018) and this book provides a range of examples that explore diverse elements of the topic. The majority of the chapters explore particular case studies, centred on examples from countries across the European Union, with the inclusion of two chapters that consider experience in Turkey and one that draws on experience in Indonesia. Four of the chapters take a more conceptual approach.

There are some classic questions in the resilience literature, one of which is to query what it is that is supposed to be resilient (‘resilience of what?’). This book takes a broad view with authors variously considering the resilience of regional economies, innovation systems, specific industrial clusters, and economic sectors. Similarly, the book takes a liberal view as to the types of shock being considered (often summed up by the question ‘resilience to what?’). While most of the cases in the book focus on the 2007/08 financial crisis, other examples include resilience to earthquakes, broader macro-economic shocks, longer-term economic trends and variations in trading conditions (bought about, for instance, by changes to membership of the World Trade Organization).

Baycan and Pinto provide a good introduction to the book, explaining that they use the notion of resilience as a bridging concept (p.6) to connect different theoretical and empirical approaches to the impact of economic turbulence. Innovation dynamics, they argue, is the crucial dimension in understanding regional resilience. This leads them to highlight two key themes for the book: first the role of innovation in overcoming economic crisis and, second, the impact of crisis on innovation actors, particularly firms and universities. The role of universities is explicitly explored in one chapter (Ortega-Colomber et al.), and it is a shame that the theme could not be given more space. Following this introductory chapter, this book is structured around three sections. The first explores ‘Innovation, crisis and resilience’, the second ‘Labour markets, employment and resilience’, and the third ‘Clusters, industrial dynamics and resilience’. There is no concluding chapter, which means that the reader is left to draw her own conclusions from the mix of materials presented.

In section one, authors examine various themes related to innovation and economic resilience. Chapters examine changes in innovation activity (as measured by the EU’s innovation scoreboard) over the period of the financial crisis; test the potential of a learning index based on the observation that resilience is shaped by the (learnt) abilities to learn and adapt; test a link between patents and the resilience of regions; and model the regional effects of macro-economic shocks. The material provided highlights the asymmetric impacts of crises as well as the role of leadership, including a willingness to adopt new approaches and to take risks (Benke et al., p.85), which in itself demonstrates a capacity for innovation. In common with many contemporary regional economic geographers, many of the chapters adopt the evolutionary perspective to economic resilience (set out most firmly in the contribution from Pinto and Santos Pereira), while Cooke takes this further by acknowledging the limitations imposed by a failure to recognize the important role of human collaborative agency in shaping resilience outcomes (p.146).
In section two, authors consider the response of labour markets to shocks. For many observers, this is one of the most crucial elements of economic resilience in that it reflects the lived experience of workers and households of shocks and disturbances. Taken together, the chapters serve to highlight the importance of context in understanding the outcomes reported. Jara and Faggian first explore the reorientation of labour markets in Chile following the 2010 earthquake. They argue that the earthquake was negatively correlated to total employment opportunities, but had little impact on wages or job switching. The chapters by Dogruel et al. and Psycharis et al. both consider how the impact of nationwide shocks can vary between regions, using the cases of Turkey and Greece respectively. The work by Psycharis et al. usefully reminds the reader that resilience can be a relative concept, with regions that decline less than the national average being judged to be the more resilient. Their work is also valuable in that it highlights the potential significance of trade flows in resilience outcomes. Similarly, Martini also introduces the reader to an important concept in economic resilience by exploring the long-run costs of an economic shock and resultant changes to economic structure. While the finding that industrial history influences outcomes and that diversified economies tend to be more resilient that those that are not is hardly ground-breaking, it is good to see the concept of economic transformation beginning to be addressed.

Section three then moves on to the theme of clusters, industrial dynamics, and resilience. This is a wide-ranging section that includes chapters on the response of the bio-pharmacy cluster in Oieras, Portugal, to the financial crisis of 2008; the resilience of software clusters in Turkey over a 40-year period; the impact of China joining the World Trade Organization on the Portuguese footwear industry, and how three craft sectors (jewellery, glass, and ceramics) in the UK’s West Midlands have evolved over time. Each of these chapters is unique, but all highlight some key resilience themes, particularly the benefit of adopting non-linear approaches to our studies of resilience and the importance of recognizing inter-scalar and inter-cluster relationships as factors that can influence resilience outcomes. Several of these chapters touch on the notion of lifecycles in cluster development, highlighting the importance of reinvention and adaptation, a theme developed more fully by Stough as he seeks to derive a typology of regional economic resiliency (p.255). Arguing that regions can be viewed as organizations, Stough emphasizes the importance of learning over long periods as a factor in how regions manage economic disequilibria. However, as Stough recognizes, this work on phenotypes is theoretical at present and requires further research to test and refine.

There is much to be enjoyed in this volume. Each chapter offers something of interest, particularly to those who have a background in the subject area. However, as I ended each section, I was left feeling disappointed that, as a collection, it could not go a little further and address the interplay of resilience, crisis, and innovation dynamics more firmly and more directly. The chapters are more descriptive than analytical and it will take a determined reader to realize the full value of the range of material presented, and to unpack just why the examples presented may have proven resilient to the crisis presented. Overall, the book demonstrates the complexity of this topic and the importance of recognizing how context can influence outcomes. The economic resilience of places, even to shocks experienced in common, is contingent on both time and context, a fact which this book highlights well.

References


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