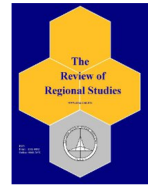




## The Review of Regional Studies

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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Jones, Martin. (2019) *Cities and Regions In Crisis: The Political Economy of Sub-National Economic Development*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA., USA. ISBN: 9781843768760, 320 pp., \$145.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by *Rolando Santos*, Lakeland Community College, Ohio

This book is a detailed theoretical and empirical insight into putting local and regional economic development in its place by questioning the what, where, how and why of state intervention, particularly in Great Britain. It captures the real-time restructuring dynamics of an increasingly neo-liberalizing local and regional economic development world and deployment of empirical material to build an interdisciplinary geographical political economy.

The first chapter offers an introduction to the regulation approach which offers a form of evolutionary and institutional economics that provides a framework in European social and political sciences. This approach emphasized the role of institutions and networks in the governance of capitalism. In chapter three, it suggests that crisis theory can help urban geographers get at the underlying logic of many of the policy experiments that have shaped Britain's cities over the last four decades. Chapter 4, on the other hand, describes the policy logics of the welfare-to-work agenda. It reflects the tough-love philosophy of "rights and responsibility" under which new opportunities for training and work preparation are provided in the context of mandatory participation requirements. In chapter 5, the book describes new regionalism as a useful entry point for exploring the current institutional and scalar turn in economic development - both theoretically and in terms of actual institutional and scalar changes. This leads to the rise of the Regional Development Agencies (RDA) but found it difficult to achieve the new regionalist vision. In the concluding chapters, the post-political condition is clearly seen not to be a coherent institutional fix that supports neoliberal growth project. City-region building frameworks are clearly incapable of addressing the dilemmas associated with uneven growth and the failure of policies to address deep-rooted problems of labor market inequalities that are integral to market and governance failures.

The approach adopted by this book draws attention to more than specifics of economic development. It encourages scholars and practitioners to think about the historically contingent and politically charged context-specific processes and practices of economic governance.

The book seeks to provide a window into the dynamics of economic development where the state is a “political process in motion.” There were lots of specific details in the book that makes it enriching to the reader although sometimes, I got lost as to what the author is really achieving. Overall, it is an academic book and a good reference for researchers in political science and economic development theorists.

**Sunstein, Cass R. (2020) *Too Much Information: Understanding What You Don't Want to Know*. MIT Press. Cambridge, MA. ISBN: 9780262044165, 252 pp., \$27.95 (hardcover).**

Reviewed by *Amitrajeet A. Batabyal*, Rochester Institute of Technology

This book addresses the following beguilingly simple question: when should governments require companies, educational institutions, hospitals, and other such entities to divulge information? The answer proposed by the author is: “When information would significantly improve people’s lives” (p. 1). The author utilizes the seven chapters of this relatively short book to expose the details of the above seemingly straightforward answer. In what follows, rather than provide a tedious chapter by chapter review, I shall sample selectively from the different chapters. This should provide the reader with an adequate flavor for the intellectual contributions of the book.

After reminding the reader that knowledge is power and that ignorance is bliss, the author asks us to recognize that even though many think that information should be provided because of a right to know, the fact is that “there is a great deal of information that people want not to receive” (p. 11). Closely related to this point is the fact that there are cases where people are willing to pay to not receive information. Therefore, it is important to comprehend that, in general, the value of information and the feelings that emerge from the receipt of this information can be positive, negative, or neutral.

Next, the author discusses how people react to bad news. He states that although their initial levels of distress are high, people tend to bounce back quickly. This state of affairs leads the author to claim that “people overstate their likely reaction to unwelcome results from predictive testing” (p. 24). This claim may well be true, but there is insufficient evidence presented to gauge its veracity.

What are the specific circumstances in which it is a good idea to require the disclosure of information? The author claims that the answer to this question is: when “it promotes human welfare” (p. 39). At the level of principle, this is fine, but there are many details to iron out in order to determine whether human welfare in any given instance has, in fact, been promoted. For instance, we must understand that when it comes to a government mandate, information should be disclosed, and the fact that a requirement gives rise to monetary benefits that exceed the monetary costs does not necessarily mean that this requirement also promotes human welfare. This is because we must also pay attention to the distributional impacts of this requirement.

Moving on, the author provides several instructive examples from medicine to support his contention that sometimes, for people with a lot of anxiety, it may be preferable to not know negative test results because “a bad result on a test produces real anxiety and distress (which are not pleasant and which may induce health problems)” (p. 48). This is certainly

a possibility, but it is also possible that not knowing now may increase welfare now but lead to greater health problems later because a person's current ignorance may result in him or her not acting to either prevent or minimize the ill effects of a non-trivial future ailment. Put differently, there is a temporal dimension to whether not knowing negative test results now is a good thing from a longer-term perspective that the author does not discuss.

From a psychological standpoint, how do people react to the provision of information? We learn that people typically display limited attention and awareness, that they pay little or no attention to missing information, and that they frequently make biased probability judgments. Also, in advisor-advisee settings, when information about an advisor having a conflict of interest is revealed to an advisee, in addition to the expected decline in advisee trust, because of the panhandler effect and insinuation anxiety, the advisee may feel increased "pressure to comply with the distrusted advice" (p. 92). Because of the salience of these and other psychological factors, we must understand that "disclosure requirements appear to have been less effective in changing recipient behavior than their most ardent proponents assume" (p. 108).

The usefulness of product labels is discussed at some length in this book. One key question concerns the correct treatment of the loss experienced by consumers when they are provided with negative information about a product that they love or enjoy. Should a government take this loss into account when deciding whether to provide the negative information? The author takes the nuanced position that if the idea is to include every effect of the provision of negative product information, then this loss should be considered. That said, from an ethical standpoint, we are rightly told that it is unclear whether a government should count as a loss "the suffering that people experience when they learn truthful information that troubles them from a moral point of view" (p. 124).

In an interesting account of Facebook, the author first delineates evidence that the use of Facebook makes users a little unhappy and that people who have given up using Facebook want to continue to use it. What explains this seemingly anomalous behavior? A plausible answer is that even if using Facebook does not make users happier, "the experience of using Facebook, including the information it provides, is valuable..." (p. 136). The author then provides some commentary on how our understanding of willingness-to-pay (WTP) in the context of social media can help shed light on the uncertain nexus between WTP and welfare. This commentary leads to a discussion of "protest answers" given by people when they are asked how much they would be willing to accept to give up a present entitlement such as a vacation. The author's potential explanations of such protest answers are more conjectural and less substantive.

Paperwork burdens introduced by governments have "massive negative effects on people's lives" (p. 156). What are some of the justifications for this kind of "sludge," and how might we attenuate sludge? The author begins this discussion by arguing five justifications for sludge: program integrity maintenance, the acquisition of useful data, self-control problems, the maintenance of privacy and security, and the need for targeting. These justifications notwithstanding, we are told that governments should do all they can to attenuate the ill effects of sludge. In order to do this correctly, it will be necessary to adopt "a heavily empirical approach to administrative burdens, including an effort to weigh their benefits against their costs and a careful assessment of their distributional effects" (p. 184).

This review will conclude with three observations. First, on a small number of occasions, the author's explanations are incomplete, and, at other times, they are a little too speculative as well as not grounded in concrete evidence. Even so, this book asks many interesting questions, and it provides thought-provoking answers to most of them. Therefore, I unreservedly recommend this book to all readers who would like to learn more about how the instrumental as well as hedonic values of information are both salient and need to be kept in mind when formulating information disclosure requirements.

**Lubin, David. (2018) *Dances of the Trillions*. Brookings Institution Press/Chatham House USA. ISBN: 9780815736745, 159 pp., \$34.99 (paperback)**

Reviewed by *Anita Cassard*, William Howard Taft University, Colorado

*Dance of the Trillions* provides the reader with vivid snapshots into the world of finance, capital migration, and globalization spanning a half-century of economic, monetary policies. David Lubin masterfully weaves the different threads of economic influencers into a colorful tapestry and explains their connections in a language understood by everyone. His comparison between lessons learned from the past, and then "unlearned" again, is a credit to his deep understanding (and enjoyment) of the topics.

This book carefully traces the ebbs and flows of global capital to emerging markets and developing economies from the 1970s to today. Lubin does this in a masterful way. In the course of the discussion, Lubin touches on the curse of hot money for many emerging markets because it is an illusion that the management of exchange rates will provide stability to the markets. In fact, the opposite seems to prevail in the global markets. More importantly, this book carefully delves into the central role of monetary policy by the United States as one of the principal drivers of capital flow cycles to emerging markets. The role of monetary policy is quite important because we have ended or are on the cusp of the end of extraordinary monetary stimulus that prevailed in the past decade in the world markets.

The central motif in this book that is often discussed in conversations around international finance is the role that China will play in the world economy. The latter is a critical question and a legitimate concern because of the rising tensions between the United States and China over trade issues. Perhaps most disturbing is the reluctance by the governments of China and the United States to address the trade issues that confront the United States and China. Could these trade disputes by the United States and China spillover into the rest of the world?

Emerging markets have numerous challenges other than the rising influence of China in the world markets as mentioned earlier. What are some of the other challenges confronting emerging markets? First, there is the shift toward protectionism by developed economies because it is rooted in the perception that globalization is perhaps bestowed too many benefits on emerging markets at the expense of low-skilled labor. Second, technological progress continues to expand which means that many low-skilled jobs are becoming increasingly obsolete. A good example of such technological progress as mentioned by Lubin is the 3D printing of running shoes. The latter illustrates the return of production from emerging markets to the developed countries because this is a consequence of the diminishing importance of wage differences that often divide the emerging and developed countries. As mentioned by Lubin,

some policymakers believe that the advent of 3D printing is a major threat to emerging economies. Finally, the continuance of the extraordinary monetary policy that generated a strong stimulus in the past decade has generated record capital flows to emerging markets that could also provide some vulnerabilities as well.

Lubin explains why it is essential to look at emerging markets from the view of current globalization, and the role of the foreign direct investment (FDI) plays are on point. The logic accompanying his accounts of the sequences of events is refreshing, and he seamlessly moves from topics of international investments to those of local economics. Depicting China as becoming "... a central node in a network of interlinked economics..." and thereby usurping trade in manufactured goods is compelling and apropos. This is a great read for investors, policymakers, economists, or readers who want to learn about what drives the well-being of billions of people outside of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For readers who are interested emerging markets, Lubin provides a good historical overview of emerging markets, how the understudied phenomenon known as capital flows has reshaped the global economies, and how attention has shifted regionally or from one region to other regions. A thoroughly enjoyable book!

**Fanzo, Jessica. (2021) *Can Fixing Dinner Fix the Planet?*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD., USA. ISBN: 9781421441122. 215 pp., \$16.95 (paperback).**

Reviewed by *Amitrajeet A. Batabyal*, Rochester Institute of Technology

A large body of research has now credibly demonstrated that nexuses exist between food systems, human diets, human health, and the climate change problem. The book under review contributes to this body of work by expansively studying how "food systems [can] be changed to promote healthy, sustainable, and equitable diets" (p. x).

The author begins the proceeding in right earnest by indicating that in the present geological epoch that is sometimes also known as the Anthropocene, human behavior over time has led to a variety of problems including, but not limited to, global warming, habitat loss, deforestation, and species extinctions. Therefore, if we do not dramatically alter the current trajectory, the author contends that we'll "soon struggle to feed, shelter, and treat our growing human population" (p. 4). She adds that even though it may not seem so, it is important to understand that individual actions impact not only on global food systems but also "the environment that supports it" (p. 8).

Are we what we eat or what we are fed? The author addresses this question in detail by making four points about human diets. First, based on her experiences working in Timor-Leste, she notes that our diets matter greatly because "diet and diet-related factors... [are] among the top five risk factors for mortality globally" (p. 15). Second, as nations industrialize and diets and lifestyles change, people tend to suffer more from obesity and diet related, non-communicable diseases and less from hunger and food insecurity. Third, as low- and middle-income nations become prosperous, they can avoid what she calls the "negative dietary trajectories" (p. 27) that some nations have created. Finally, we must comprehend that the notions of human health and planetary health go together, and the "cords that bind them are our diets and the food systems from which those diets originate" (p. 43).

Why is it that global hunger, after declining for many years, is now increasing again? We learn that the two factors that are responsible for this saturnine state of affairs are conflict and climate change. As such, the author contends that it will be necessary for individual “and national purchasing and eating patterns to change. People will need to buy less food, and they will have to exercise greater food consciousness to reduce spoilage and waste” (p. 49). A related point is that even though crop yields in general have begun to stagnate, planet earth has gotten warmer because humans are now altering the climate in ways that are likely to lead to significantly negative outcomes. Therefore, even if we greatly curtail our emissions of the so-called greenhouse gases, “if our food systems remain on their current course, they will likely lead to 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming by the end of the century” (p. 55). Given this insalubrious state of affairs, the author states that we must determine how to meet the world’s caloric and nutritional needs while ensuring two things: (1) we not harm the planet any further and, (2) farmers have the support they need to adapt to a changing climate.

Do we have the right to eat wrongly? The author addresses this provocative question by shedding light on four interrelated issues. These issues are the inequities in accessing affordable healthy diets, the ways in which food environments are built and designed, the unsustainability of present animal production and consumption, and the marginalization of women in most food systems. She makes the eminently sensible point that instead of consuming low-quality food, people need to eat healthier food. What prevents them from doing so is that healthier foods “tend to be more expensive because they’re perishable and require extra care, including cold storage and distribution to get from point A to point B” (p. 86). For their part, policymakers need to create more accountability within governments and the food industry so that existing inequities within the food system are addressed and we bequeath a healthy planet to future generations. The author focuses on how this can be conducted in the last two chapters of the book.

The penultimate chapter concentrates on the policy changes that will need to be made to transform the global food system for the better. However, it will often be difficult to change the existing mindset of policymakers. To illustrate this point, the author points to her experience working in Timor-Leste. In particular, she found it very difficult to convince the Ministry of Agriculture that it ought to be thinking about agriculture from a nutritional standpoint and not only from the perspective of “increasing productivity of rice for income generation” (p. 121). She goes on to make a salient point about the importance of limiting the promotion and marketing of unhealthy foods. In this regard, she emphasizes the deleterious impacts of television advertising because “advertisers often use child-oriented persuasion to promote junk food, that inevitably makes kids beg their parents to buy these unhealthy processed foods” (p. 131). The author ends this discussion of policies by pointing out that if nutritional and environmental outcomes are to be changed for the better, it will then be necessary for both the government as well as the food and beverage industries to cooperate with each other.

The focus of the final chapter is on actions that individuals can take to improve human health and protect the environment at the same time. In this regard, the author identifies three concrete but also practical steps we can take. First, we must stop the excessive consumption of calories. Second, we need to eschew highly processed foods that are invariably

unhealthy. Finally, people resident in middle- and high-income nations need to reduce their consumption of animal source foods, specifically that of beef. Doing these three things together will lead most of us to transition towards plant-based diets. This positive development will “reduce global mortality by 6 to 10 percent and food-related greenhouse gas emissions by 29 to 70 percent compared with the current trajectory scenario up to 2050” (p. 165).

Let me conclude this review by noting that this book contains a very small number of factual errors and statements that can be challenged. For example, on p. 129, the author claims that Cass Sunstein is a Nobel prize laureate. He is not. That said, this book provides a fine introductory account of many of the problems concerning the trinity of food consumption, human health, and global warming. As such, I recommend this book to all readers who would like to know more about the ways in which individuals and governments can take actions to influence our planet’s agricultural and environmental policies for the better.