
Editorial

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Biographical notes: Heather Fulford is Professor of Entrepreneurship and Academic Director in the Centre for Entrepreneurship at Aberdeen Business School, Robert Gordon University, Scotland. She is the Editor of *Cases in Innovation for Researchers, Teachers and Students*.

Innovation is widely acknowledged to be one of the key drivers for both business and economic growth. During recessions and periods of economic difficulty, the search for opportunities to innovate becomes a priority for business leaders across industry sectors, in order to help ensure firm survival, stimulate firm rejuvenation where required and appropriate, and if possible to secure continued business growth and success. Furthermore, redundancies and unemployment act as a stimulus for innovation and entrepreneurship at the level of individuals. At such times too, the notion of innovation tends to rise to the top of government agendas at both regional and national level as policymakers recognise its importance for regional sustainability, and seek to harness the potential of innovation for economic regeneration and growth. Social innovation tends to come to the fore also, as community cohesion, stability and sustainability become priorities when social deprivation, poverty and unemployment threaten.

Building on some of the core themes and topics presented and debated at the 6th European Conference on Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ECIE 2011, Aberdeen, UK), this special issue of the *International Journal of Innovation and Regional Development* is devoted to research exploring innovation as a means to regenerating businesses, communities and regions particularly during, or in the aftermath of, straitened economic times.

Jill Kickul and Lisa Gundry present a study of a global non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has successfully employed a unique approach to innovation to achieve sustainable change by supporting an early-stage partner NGO. They illustrate how a clear focus on, and commitment to, sustainability enables decision makers to look to the long-term future rather than simply making immediate, short-sighted decisions. The case studies they discuss demonstrate how an approach involving the development of measurable innovative processes leads to long-term sustainable impact.

During a period of considerable economic challenge and uncertainty in Greece, Maria Markatou from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens makes a timely contribution to discussions about future growth and development directions for the country. In her study of innovation in sustainable technological fields in Greece, focusing particularly on environmental innovation, she examines a collection of patent data in an effort to gain insights into those areas where innovation is thriving in Greece, and also

those areas where levels of innovation are lower. Markatou makes the point that innovation is going to be key to Greece's future regeneration and sustainability, but that in order to be truly effective, that innovation must be purposeful and strategically focused. This paper should provide some useful pointers for how best to shape future innovation policy in Greece in order to help the country compete more effectively in both European and global marketplaces.

Using the case of a pulp and paper plant in Sweden, Michael Novotny and Cali Nuur illustrate how regeneration in a peripheral region began to be achieved through a multi-agency collaborative approach to innovation and industry transformation. Their study highlights how collaboration, involving national, regional and local institutions, enabled a traditional industry to enter a new market by making incremental improvements to technologies and redesigning marketing strategies, and in so doing gain first mover advantage.

Carine Deslée discusses the case of the French national railways company (SNCF), and explores the role played by participative innovation in helping the company to meet the challenges of a changing competitive environment. A core contribution of this study is the longitudinal perspective that Deslee adopts as she looks back through the company's history and considers how participative innovation has gradually permeated various aspects of the company's operations and planning activities, up to the point that it has now become fully integrated into the strategic plan. There are lessons to be learned here for other large organisations with regard to the value of participative innovation as a tool to help drive and support corporate strategy.

Rauno Pirinen from the Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland investigates the role that higher education establishments can play in helping to contribute to regional development through engagement in research and development activities, innovation, networking and strategic partnerships.

Erno Salmela, Cláudio Santos and Ari Happonen examine the formalisation of front end innovation activity. Their context is the supply chains in the machinery manufacturing sector in Finland. Their goal was to derive insights into how formalised front end innovation can deliver benefits for companies. They stress the importance for companies not to ignore such internal processes and operations when seeking ways to boost their innovative capability in order to gain and sustain competitive advantage.

Arising from a study of social enterprises in the south west of England, Christos Apostolakis from the University of Bournemouth presents a framework for strategy formulation in social enterprises, and suggests that innovation must be core to social enterprise strategy. He notes the resource constraints that often hinder considered and careful strategy development in many social enterprises.

The papers in this special issue are varied in both context and approach. It is this variety that serves to illustrate how true regeneration can best be achieved when innovation activity is not confined to one type of organisation, or to one industry sector. Partnerships and collaborative working are key: across organisational boundaries, between government agencies and commercial enterprises, between NGOs, and between industry and education.