

## EDITORIAL

The articles contained in this issue go back to the fifth Dutch-German Seminar on Economic Geography which was jointly organised by EGBERT WEVER, Utrecht, and HANS H. BLOTEVOGEL, Duisburg, and which took place in Mülheim/Ruhr in May 1996.

The first idea to organise a Dutch-German Seminar on Economic Geography was conceived in the mid 1980s when a small group of Dutch and (West) German economic geographers decided to improve mutual contacts and to establish a platform for presenting and discussing both theoretical issues as well as empirical findings. The result was a first seminar held in Aachen in 1988, HELMUTH BREUER being the local organiser. Since then four more meetings followed: in Nijmegen (1990), Reinhausen/Göttingen (1992), Garderen/Apeldoorn (1994) and Mülheim/Ruhr (1996). The seminar has by now become a tradition, and it is intended to continue this series of bilateral conferences. In fact, interest in participating has grown steadily. At the fifth meeting, in Mülheim, as many as 50 persons attended. The vivid exchange of ideas and the personal networks that have been established have already been beneficial for many participants.

The output of each of the first four meetings was a volume of collected contributions, presenting revised versions of most of the papers given during the conferences:

DE SMIT, M. and WEVER, E. (Eds.) (1989): Regional and local economic policies and technology. Utrecht/Amsterdam. Nederlandse Geografische Studies, vol. 99.

DE SMIT, M. and WEVER, E. (Eds.) (1991): Complexes, formations and networks. Utrecht/Amsterdam. Nederlandse Geografische Studies, vol. 132.

GAEBE, W. and SCHAMP, E. W. (Eds.) (1994): Gateways to the European market: case studies from the Netherlands and Germany. Münster. Wirtschaftsgeographie, vol. 4.

VAN DER KNAAP, G. A. and WEVER, E. (Eds.) (1996): Industrial organization: the firm and its labour market. Utrecht. Nederlandse Geografische Studies, vol. 207.

After the Mülheim seminar it was decided not to produce another book but to launch a special issue in one of our major journals instead. The main reason was not a lack of good contributions compared to the former conferences, but a reflection of the recent discussion among German geographers on the inflation of publications and especially of books containing heterogenous conference proceedings and the subsequent drying out of the established journals. As one of the organisers of the Mülheim seminar is a member of the editorial board of *Erdkunde* the present issue was arranged.

For this publication we put together six of the papers presented at the Mülheim seminar. This small selection does by no means imply that all other contributions are not worth being published. Either they are or will be published elsewhere or the speakers declared themselves unable to produce a written version within a few months, and in the end we just had to select from several nearly equivalent contributions due to the given space limit. We surely regret that our decision in favour of a journal issue prevents an inclusion of all good and stimulating contributions.

This selection of six articles represents a cross-section of the whole programme of the Mülheim seminar. According to our intention of emphasising theoretical and methodological questions three contributions mainly deal with theoretical concepts: ROBERT HASSINK (Dortmund) on 'clusters', 'districts' and 'milieus', PÄIVI OINAS (Helsinki/Rotterdam) on 'regional embeddedness', as well as RON BOSCHMA (Enschede) on the concept of 'windows of locational opportunity'. The other three papers are more empirical, but nevertheless with a clear (and corresponding) theoretical orientation: BARBARA LENZ and KLAUS KULINAT (Stuttgart) deal with contact-networks and regional milieus in Württemberg, co-operation between small and medium sized firms in the Neckar-Alb-Region is studied by REINHOLD GROTZ and BORIS BRAUN (Bonn) whereas STEPHANIE LOWEY (Würzburg) is investigating a similar topic in Lower and Middle Franconia.

The mere listing of headlines shows the key notions around which the papers and discussions of the Mülheim seminar were centered and which form the focus of the present issue as well. We hope that the reader will get at least some impression of the stimulating atmosphere of the Mülheim conference and appreciate the selected contributions which mark a major front of current research in economic geography.

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