

DEBATES AND DEVELOPMENTS

Rethinking the Conceptual Foundations of Evolutionary Economic Geography: Introduction to a Debate

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As the recently published *Handbook of Evolutionary Economic Geography* (Boschma and Martin, 2010) attests, the whole field of evolutionary economic geography is witnessing exciting times of renewal and rethinking of its conceptual foundations. Set against this broader picture of pervasive transformation, the narrower focus of this symposium is on the recent rethinking of regional path dependence proposed by one key contributor to the field, Cambridge economic geographer Ron Martin. His Roepke Lecture in Economic Geography, 'Rethinking Regional Path Dependence: Beyond Lock-in to Evolution', delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers in Las Vegas (2009) has recently been published in *Economic Geography* (Martin, 2010) and is seen by many as a turning point in the history of evolutionary economic geography. In a nutshell, Martin argues that the canonical model of path dependence and its key concept of lock-in provides a limited account of regional economic evolution, because it is based on dubious assumptions of equilibristic thinking and thereby emphasizes continuity at the expense of change. Drawing on recent work in sociology and political science, Martin proposes a rethinking of path dependence in economic geography that underscores the importance of change. This debate consists of an in-depth and comparative critical evaluation of these ideas, contributed by three scholars with diverse educational backgrounds and institutional affiliations (Oosterlynck — Department of Sociology, Leuven University, Belgium; Drahokoupil — Department of Political Science, Mannheim University, Germany; Simandan — Department of Geography, Brock University, Canada). This refreshing diversity of perspectives allows for a nuanced analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of Martin's contribution, and is likely to become a reference point for future conversations in evolutionary economic geography. Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, this collection of essays hosted by IJURR is the first in-depth debate of Martin's contribution in the English-speaking world, and thus sets the tone for subsequent disciplinary conversations. I am delighted that Ron Martin has agreed to provide a detailed response to the three commentaries, thereby clarifying some of the points raised in his lecture and making this symposium a true conversation dedicated to a key segment of the exciting work of conceptual innovation in evolutionary economic geography.

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References

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