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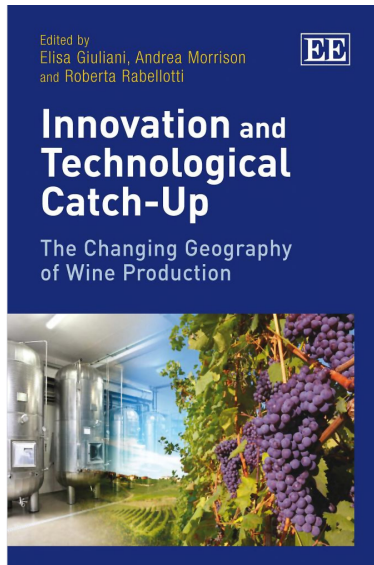
Innovation and Technological Catch-Up: The Changing Geography of Wine Production

Elisa Giuliani, Andrea Morrison, and Roberta Rabellotti, eds. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2011. x and 232 pp., tables, index. \$112.00 cloth (ISBN 978-1-84844-994-7).

Reviewed by José A. Borello, Instituto del Conurbano, Universidad Nacional de General Sarmiento, Province of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Although this book has a global perspective, its focus is placed on wine production in the countries of Argentina, Australia, Chile, and South Africa. From this empirical context, the volume looks at innovation and technological progress. Edited by three economists, this is a book that will appeal to human geographers interested in a number of topics, including innovation, development, production chains, and technological advancement. In addition to the editors, contributors to this book include eight researchers based in universities and research centers located across the world.

This book has nine chapters. After an introduction by the editors, the book unfolds in eight additional papers organized in two parts: “Catching Up in the Wine Industry” and “Drivers of Technological Catch-Up in the Wine Industry: Universities, Public–Private Institutions, Researchers and Firms.” The first part includes chapters on catching-up trajectories, on the changing geography of wine, and on the contributions of the innovation system to Australia’s wine industry growth. The second part is made up of articles on universities’ contributions to wine region development in Chile and Argentina; on institutions and networks in the remaking of the Argentine



wine sector; on the wine innovation systems of Chile and South Africa; and on knowledge, science, and interactions in South Africa’s wine industry. The book concludes with summing up and policy reflection by the editors on the drivers of “catching up” and on innovation and its role in development.

It seems odd that a book centered on a specific activity such as wine making did not include a brief chapter on the general anatomy of wine making and its agricultural base. Such a discussion would have shown that in the primary activities behind wine making there are still (in some of the countries studied) archaic structures, although technology is also diffusing here in a number of ways. Such a discussion would have also shown that a number of backward linkages from wine making are still missing in most of these countries. For example, although this volume shows well how these countries have caught up in a number of ways with major European wine producers, we learn little about the weaknesses regarding producers of machinery and equipment for wine making. Not only have the latter not caught up, but, at least in Chile and Argentina, they have digressed in terms of organizational schemes prevalent in these countries as late as the 1950s.

It is true that in a book that deals both with a global perspective and with a number of individual countries there is little room to accommodate the intricacies of processes taking place at the regional scale. Yet some of the chapters actually do that, and I particularly enjoyed Gerald A. McDermott and Rafael A. Corredoira’s chapter, “Public–Private Institutions, Shifting Networks and the Remaking of the Argentine Wine Sector.” This work shows the differences in the recent transformation

of the institutions connected to wine making in two major wine-making provinces: Mendoza and San Juan. What I found missing not only in this chapter but also in the other chapters about Chile and Argentina were more references to previous work undertaken by researchers in these countries. Although it is true that the orientation of this volume is original, and that a few studies (undertaken by local researchers) are cited, there are a number of complementary studies that would have provided more fine detail and location-specific context to the respective chapters.

The book shows clearly that in a number of ways (e.g., in institutional arrangements and in science and technology activities) countries can catch up and they can do so in apparently low-technology, agriculturally based activities. This book takes an interesting perspective by arguing that development is also possible through a traditional activity such as wine making. This view stands in sharp contrast both with traditional views that purport the centrality of manufacturing to development and with more recent accounts of accelerated development through information-technology-related activities, particularly in Asia.

I agree very much with the optimistic tone that permeates most of the book; yes development is possible. Still the idea of catching up seems to blind us from considering any ideas that seem regressive, as if history could only move forward. And indeed at least in the Argentinean case and in quantitative terms, since at least the early 1980s the wine-producing complex has gone through a deep restructuring process with a number of social and political upheavals even if the volume of exports has, at the same time, skyrocketed.

It also seems to me that the idea of catching up does not do adequate justice to what went before. In the cases analyzed in the text perhaps a little bit more weight should be given to the import-substitution industrialization efforts and to the partial construction of a modern state apparatus that went before the mid-1970s and 1980s. In other words, catching up is only possible when certain

entrepreneurial, institutional, and scientific infrastructure and linkages are already in place.

This book is a timely contribution in a number of ways. First, it revives the comparison between countries with a similar economic and export orientation but with very different development paths (e.g., Australia and Argentina or Chile and South Africa), something that will interest economic historians and people interested in the analysis of development trajectories. Second, the book joins a significant debate among economists and social scientists interested in development issues in general, focusing on whether developing countries should concentrate on commodities and primary-based activities or on manufacturing, a debate that had apparently been settled in favor of the latter a long time ago. Third, this volume shows in a unique and original way that a comparative perspective (across countries) might yield interesting insights. Fourth, some of chapters draw on databases that are becoming increasingly accessible (e.g., on science and technology activities) and that make viable a number of very incisive analyses that were not so long ago impossible.

This book concludes with a list of four “lessons to be learned.” The first one has to do with a topic we have already mentioned: The traditional sector can be an alternative for development. The second lesson is indeed an important one, for it underscores the need to measure innovation through both traditional as well as alternative indicators. Lesson three stresses the need to combine local capability building with access to foreign knowledge. Although I agree with this lesson, I believe that we need to retain a critical view on foreign knowledge and their main carriers (multinational corporations and national states). In that sense (and I am not speaking here about this book) I strongly disagree with the current naive view about multinationals as active and benevolent agents of knowledge diffusion in the developing world. Lesson four deals with the need to develop networks of public and private actors to foster learning and innovation, and this book presents very interesting evidence to support this lesson.