Guest editorial

From Transitional to Radical Knowledge-based Development

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With this issue, the Journal of Knowledge Management begins a series of annual Special Issues devoted to Knowledge-Based Development (KBD). Since a first attempt in 2002, when a Special Issue on Knowledge-based Development was published as Vol. 6 No. 4, the topic has been consolidating thanks to the continued support of Rory Chase, the Journal’s General Editor and Rachel Murawa, Managing Editor. Our major concern was, in that first SI, to lay down a sound foundation for the bridging of KM and KBD. The challenge was to introduce KBD to the KM community as both a naturally related and significant topic.

Owing to the good reception of that first SI, a new one was published in 2004 as Vol. 8 No. 5. under the heading: “Knowledge-based Development II: Knowledge Cities”. The increasing attention that Knowledge Cities have been receiving in recent years allowed the collection of a substantial set of contributions that on the whole provided a stimulating state-of-the art account. That second SI won the Emerald prize for the best special issue out of 140 special issues in 2004.

After those experiences, the SI on KBD became annual starting 2006. In the current issue, an attempt has been made to gain in consistency along a number of lines that seem to be shaping this emerging field: interdisciplinarity, conceptual and methodological variety, empirical evidence, systems approach and, particularly, strategic perspective.

Interdisciplinarity is key to sustaining Knowledge-based Development as an emerging field by contributing to attract the relevant R&D talent. On one hand, Growth Theory had been a well established area of Economics even before KM itself emerged as a radically new approach to managing organizational value during the 1980s and 1990s. Other disciplines such as Sociology and Anthropology had a major stake in Social and Economic Development. On the other hand, Urban Studies and Urban Planning were engaged with cities as development units long before the distinctive opportunities for knowledge-based urban development became evident. Other disciplines as well, such as Geography and Demographics are fundamental to conceptualizing Knowledge Cities. Since no single discipline can be capable of dealing adequately on its own with the complex realities of the knowledge societies, transdisciplinarity becomes a precondition to significant learning. Our aim is that specialists from these fields join forces with the KM community in the collective building of KBD as a discipline.

Conceptual and methodological variety seems also indispensable to KBD. From epistemological grounds to research techniques, a number of different approaches are required to tackle each of the social components of knowledge value dynamics. There is no assumption that conceptual and methodological eclecticism will per se obtain a plausible synthesis. But it seems inevitable that whatever alternative frameworks
claiming to provide a satisfactory account of KBD will have to include and articulate theoretical and methodological resources able to include all the sciences and techniques of knowledge.

Empirical evidence is a critical test to the soundness of any conceptual and technical solution. The reporting of cases, statistical data, ethnographic studies and other forms of contrasting KBD models with social realities have been particularly welcomed. Also, a systems approach seems fundamental to integrate the diverse, complex and often novel phenomena characterising the social creation and distribution of knowledge.

Finally, and perhaps most distinctively, a strategic perspective for KBD seems necessary to realize its explanatory and transformational promise. Since the 2002 Special Issue, contributions have ranged from the instrumental or object-centered, through the human or subject-centered, to the strategic or context-centered epistemology. Much like happens in KM, the 1st and 2nd generations of KBD are rather widespread while the 3rd seems to be embrionary. This can be described as a transitional phase of KBD.

Nevertheless, an increasing awareness about the necessity to bring KM and KBD to their full strategic perspective can be documented. Such perspective involves, basically, an acknowledgment that the concepts and tools devised to explain, account and manage the material-based value processes underlying the industrial economy are not sufficient to deal with the symbolic-based value processes underlying the knowledge society. A straightforward implication of this realization is that an altogether new axiological, epistemological and political platform may be required to build the foundations for KBD, one in which we are capable of mapping, accounting and organising not just the economic impact of knowledge factors, but the universe of social value dimensions as a complete and consistent system. This can be described in turn as the radical phase of KBD.

The current issue carries contributions that one way or another serve the above criteria of interdisciplinarity, conceptual and methodological variety, empirical evidence, systems approach and strategic perspective. Individually, some may look closer to 1st- and 2nd-generation KBD, but collectively they seem to evolve towards a more cultural and holistic perspective.

To begin, Leif Edvinsson sheds new light on urban design by exploring some lessons learnt from knowledge city initiatives. Next, the paper by Matthiessen, Schwartz and Find provides a rich picture of research output patterns from major metropoles of the world. Simmie and Strambach, in turn, explore the contribution of KIBS (knowledge-intensive businesses) to regional development.

Some methodological resources are provided by the following contributions. Martins and Viedma introduce a method to assess regional intellectual capital and enhance its economic impact; while Bañegil and Sanguino look at the processes of intellectual capital visualization and exchange within a network of cities along the Spanish-Portuguese
The paper by Ergazakis, Metaxiotis, Psarras and Askounis offers a unified method for KCs Development, building on prior KBD special issues.

Cases do not provide reality checks only, they also substantiate some of the trends mentioned above. Wong, Millar and Choi look at the synergies between ICTs and culture in the case of Singapore. Goldberg, Pasher and Levin-Sagi offer an account of several citizen participation and decision-making tools applied in the Israeli city of Holon. Blanca Garcia offers a rich mosaic of learning conversations and knowledge socialization in Greater Manchester as a KC.

Finally, some of the contributions look directly at the implications and new dimensions of KBD and Knowledge Cities. Dvir, Schwartzberg, Avni, Webb and Lettice describe the nature and role of urban Future Centers in fostering knowledge innovation. The paper by McElroy, Jorna, and van Engelen offers a comprehensive perspective of Social Capital as mostly comprised of knowledge, drawing significant conclusions for KBD. Closing this issue, Raza, Kausar and Paul provide a critique of the dominant, western view of development and propose a KBD framework based on culture and cognition.

I want to take this opportunity to invite all JKM readers to engage in this creative process by contributing with theoretical, methodological, or empirical research papers to further annual editions of the SI on Knowledge-based Development. The call for papers for the 2007 annual SI appears at the end of this issue.