Evolutionary Perspectives on Industrial District Change

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Numerous studies of industrial districts claim to "do evolutionary analysis", but the application of evolutionary principles is often imprecise and uneven. For example, the term evolution is sometimes used in a very general sense, denoting a process of gradual change and equating change with progress, as in many discussions of district maturation. Evolution is sometimes assigned teleological meaning, as in debates about the role of institutional entrepreneurship and policy intervention in district building. It is also often not clear if the mechanisms involved in the generation of new variation and the retention of selected variations are generalizeable across industrial districts.

In an attempt to further develop evolutionary explanations of industrial district development, we seek paper contributions that add precision to evolutionary accounts of change processes and mechanisms. Papers may be conceptual or empirical, and they may address issues such as the following:

- What does it mean to say that an industrial district has evolved? Is it possible to identify distinct thresholds or critical values?
- What should be the fundamental unit of inquiry? What is the unit that evolves?
- What is the appropriate level of analysis at which units of selection have most force?
- How useful is it to study the district as a nested system of practices, individuals, organizations, and networks?
- What is the source of novelty? How does heterogeneity translate into developmental opportunities?
- What is the role of human agency in district evolution? What aspects of districts are enacted, translated, prevented, enforced, or weakened by individuals who plan, improvise, reiterate, imitate, or forget?
- What kinds of network constellations are most conducive to change? Do these constellations vary over the life cycle of districts?