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Management geography: its potential and agenda

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In the fields of International Business (IB) and Economic Geography, Management Geography (ManGeo) is attracting increasing attention from researchers studying economic activities ranging from micro to macro levels and from socio-economic to cultural features. ManGeo is a new branch of economic geography that focuses on the nexus of practices and decision-making of firms and related agencies in a globalizing world from a geographical perspective. The research objectives are manifold, including the analysis of the socio-economic and cognitive spatial behavior of various managerial actors. In the discussion of the potential of ManGeo, the importance of knowledge creation and innovation in both academia and the corporate world is widely recognized. Scholars have been tackling management issues in the context of the spatial features of firm activities. Michael Porter (2000: 272), a prominent leading scholar in the management study, suggested that “geography and location must become one of the core disciplines in management”. ManGeo analyzes and evaluates locations, places and landscapes of management activities. Managerial subjects themselves can be conceptualized as *hybrid* when showing local responsiveness; or fast *subjects* when integrating strategies globally. Managers make decisions in the context of global reach and local changes. Managerial decision-making needs to embrace compliance, show philanthropic commitment, develop purposeful interventions exerting spatial leadership by assisting transitions and creating prospects. Consequently, ManGeo research group discusses and theorizes managerial dynamics observed at the macro, meso and micro level. The current range of our research spans from regional development via nurturing green service ecology, digitalization spurring the transition towards a green economy in the world, especially the EU; and explores emerging industry of digital assets, delivery services and the role of social networks in East Asia. Our speakers will provide novel evidence from case study research of MNEs, SMEs and family businesses to promote theoretical developments in the field of Management Geography.

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EU’s Green deal and VUCA – Challenges for ManGeo research group

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Abstract

Thus far, the spatial dimensions of cross-border or cross-contextual management have provided additional insights and perspectives to traditional international management research in international business studies. As we aim to reflect the current developments of the contemporary world and how they are mirrored in the management practices of international business, it is natural to extend our attention to how the Green Transformation (GX) is implemented—if at all—in the managerial practices of corporations operating in multinational and cross-cultural contexts. The EU introduced its Green Deal in 2019, aiming to “transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy” (commission.europa.eu) that emphasizes human and spatial inclusiveness, the net-zero emissions goal, and economic growth decoupled from resource use. Indeed, this presents profound challenges for international business.

However, the overall uncertainties and risks we face today have increased the complexity of global business, and knowledge about how this is reflected in corporate GX strategies remains limited. Here, the additional

insights provided by the VUCA dimensions—volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—can support our research field and open new avenues for investigation. In short, we need to understand more about the challenges international businesses face in their GX efforts and how these challenges translate into managerial practices and actions in companies operating across borders.

In this keynote, the implications and challenges that the EU Green Deal presents for international leadership and management studies is addressed, viewed from the perspective of the Management Geography research field.

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Management between digitalization and sustainability in a global society encountering VUCA

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Originally a vision launched by the Japanese government in 2016, the Smart cities concept or Society 5.0 has attracted attention not only in Japan, but also in the EU in connection to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the UN. This development can be seen in the light of increasing climate challenges and the debate on how society needs a broader transformation, aided by digital means, to achieve a sustainable future. The transition has different connotations through policy development and is initiated with both a bottom-up and top-down perspective. In addition, this development coincides with the complexity of technological development and the evolution of society at large and the business context. These endeavors are, and will not, develop in an isolated context, but rather through globalization in trade and investment conducted by private firms of various size and industry anchoring, bringing the economies of Japan and the EU closer together. The recent Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), and the Green Alliance are involving issues such as climate change and connectivity. Here, multinational enterprises in both geographic areas will play a central role in developing on the green transition in an era of increasingly complex geopolitical change. Using Japan-EU relations and digitalization of the Japanese society as the units for discussion, this paper aims at studying challenges in the economic and business contexts associated with the Smart Cities and Society 5.0 concepts. Developing sustainable society and urban formations based on information and communication technology (ICT) requires a critical assessment on what stakeholders can bring in relation to the transition towards a green economy and how the public sector and private business can contribute in such a transformation. This development relates to the issue of how policy is being developed and anchored within a society.

Keywords: Sustainability, Digitalization, Connectivity, Economy, Energy, Security, Geopolitics

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Geography, management, and institutional quality: What impacts the performance of the Polish Investment Zone and MNE embeddedness? A conceptual approach

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Special economic zones (SEZs) attract investors, but they are distributed in Poland unevenly because, among other things, the management of SEZs is characterized by high asymmetry of institutional quality. The local

and regional governments may indicate the effectiveness of such an investment incentive scheme, but sceptical assessments suggest second-best solutions. Nevertheless, efforts made by the zone management to provide efficient services to investors also played an important role. Thus, we need to ask: Does the quality of zone administration matter? What is the role of trust-building and network formation of local and managerial subjects for the MNE embedding process? From the Management Geography perspective, we would like to investigate the role of trust-building and network formation in multinational enterprises. MNE managers and business environment organizations (BEOs) representatives, e.g., SEZs and local government units, as boundary spanners, play an important role in dealing with geopolitical, economic and social challenges. As our previous research indicates, one of the biggest is the transformation towards a green economy. Hence we propose our original Three Level Model to investigate a) Green deal policy and quality of governance implications for MNE location decisions and corporate strategy (macro level), b) organizational MNE embeddedness (meso level), and individual managers' adjustments (micro level). We assume that the trust-building and network formation of the MNE management and governance quality are important in the transformation towards a green economy. Findings from previous research showed that a) the location decision was impacted by the EU's Green Deal and the quality of BEOs, b) organizational MNE embeddedness might be achieved by strategies aiming to promote the green economy, and (c) managerial adjustments enable a smooth integration in the local economy. We propose to apply this approach to a multiple case study investigating the role of actors in MNEs and BEOs in successfully transforming the local and regional economy towards a green one. We also plan to apply our original coding system for further qualitative analysis.

Keywords: Three level model, governance, managerial network, MNE embeddedness,

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Post-COVID Localization of Human Resources at Japanese Companies in Urban China: The Embeddedness Theory Approach with Insights from White-Collar Workers

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This study examines the factors shaping white-collar recruitment, employment and job retention at Japanese companies across urban China. It employed an Embeddedness Theory perspective within the context of evolving labor market structures. In recent years, China's labor market has undergone significant upheaval, with a growing trend of graduates returning to their hometowns due to increasing employment challenges in major cities. Against this backdrop, Japanese companies—once attractive for their remuneration, fair evaluations, and favorable work conditions, are seeing a decline in popularity, partly due to excessive localization and limited recruitment efforts on Chinese campuses. This research focuses on Japanese manufacturing, financial and service firms in major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Guangzhou, with additional attention to large cities such as Tianjin and Suzhou. Through employee interviews, the study explores the reasons for joining Japanese firms, motivations for staying, and the factors influencing those who choose to leave. Findings indicate that employees who remain with Japanese firms do so primarily due to their embeddedness in regional networks, alignment with personal career paths, and a preference for stability amid market turbulence. In contrast, those who depart cite an inability to strengthen ties with local networks as a key reason for leaving. This study provides insights into how shifts in social labor structures

are impacting Japanese companies' strategic approaches, underscoring the need for these firms to adapt effectively to remain competitive in China's dynamic employment landscape.

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Chinese Entrepreneur's Success in Japan: case study on cross-cultural management in relational space: Case study Research on Relationship Building and intercultural skills

Xuesong WANG (Ritsumeikan University)

Intercultural skills and networking strategies of entrepreneurs need to be discussed in the cultural context. Representative sampling Chinese entrepreneurs with a long span of successful business experiences in Japan led to the single case study research employing the Gioia method. The findings reveal encompassing awareness, studying, solving, and practicing enabled acculturation processes marked by the creation of business synergy. Consequently, trust-based networking strategies effectively bridge cultural divides, fostering both growth and innovation. This study provides practical insights and theoretical implications into how managerial subjects can leverage intercultural skills and build strategic partnerships to navigate in overseas business environments.

Keywords: Chinese entrepreneur, cross-cultural skills, networking, business synergy

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The Space of Business Ecosystems: Are relational space and topical space in business ecosystems perceived as global?

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This study investigates international business ecosystems consisting mainly of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) through a case study of Japanese headquartered in Kyoto. These are local firms in that their headquarters are not in major Japanese metropolitan areas such as Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka. The firms in this study concentrate on video game development and services. These firms are closely linked to larger, not SME size firms locally, regionally, and globally. Despite their limited size and resources, they have impact on major corporations and their digital products reach users globally. Of importance to this study, the firms do not compete directly against each other. Thus, there is little pressure restricting interaction among the firms. Those firms boasting their own products, generally referred to as independent, or indie, studios, that are founded by foreigners or operate similarly. Such firms may interact in relational or topical spaces as much or more than physical spaces. Indeed, relational and topical spaces explain how the firms interact indirectly with a loose global network as well as their fellow firms within the city boundaries. The firms in the study form a local network that engages with other local networks through a complex global business ecosystem of the video game industry. This larger ecosystem includes multiple networks that exchange resources, physical, intangible, and virtual, to innovate and find partners. The global network may deliver shocks such as regulation originating in China, the USA, or the EU, as well as opportunities through major projects, market opportunities, demand for services, or provision of specialized skills. The Kyoto area network includes a limited number of SMEs and larger firms, about 40, with a few more employing more than 500. Of course, the largest organization looming over all others is Nintendo. This giant contributed heavily to the creation of the global video game ecosystem, yet it does not interact directly with more than a few local firms. Instead, the firms interaction through topics of mutual interest such as creating and publishing own games, attraction of talent, learning about trends, and so on. Their interaction in shared

relational spaces is more limited, few of the firms make contracts with each other locally or with key firms outside the local area. Rather, relations are widespread and diffuse with firms around the world. As a result of information, opportunities, and innovative ideas that arrive through ecosystem, these SMEs enjoy resilience and survivability. Over long term, the local-global ecosystem supports firms by not requiring them to compete directly and allowing them to offer expertise in contractual relationships as well as informally. The local SMEs interact mainly indirectly as part of a larger ecosystem. These benefits may be gained by other firms and industries that learn to join ecosystems in order to survive locally and compete globally as they interact indirectly mainly through topical space.

Keywords: business ecosystem, small and medium-sized enterprises, globalization, localization, cross-border interaction

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Spurring theoretical discussion on Management Geography as an interdisciplinary subject

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Management Geography focuses on the nexus between ‘the corporation, the management, the manager and space’ and bridges debates between regional economics, economic geography, international business, and management studies. The objective is to describe, analyze, explain, evaluate locations, places and landscapes of management activities, their structures and dynamics, their relationships, networks and practices, and the management of economic, social and cognitive spatial realms in multi-scalar configurations. Hereby, a multi-spatial management coordination task can be envisioned that tries to balance corporate performance through concentration- dispersion (agglomeration (dis-) economies), interaction-isolation (proximity (dis-)economies), and/or perception-agnosia (experience (dis-)economies). We like to sketch the origins and defines. Management Geography elaborates upon general developments such as the rise of globalization, the network and digital society, and a cognitive-cultural capitalism that ask for such multi-spatial management tasks in business management, provide fields of application. WE give an outlook how Management geography can contribute towards future research paths within business management and geography.

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Thinking through transnational managerial partnerships: Nagi Ramen in the Philippines

Tim Reiffenstein (Mount Allison University, Canada)

The purpose of this paper is to explore, via a case study of Tokyo’s Nagi Ramen’s operations in the metropolitan Manila market, the unique international management challenges of cross-cultural partnerships in the culinary businesses. Nagi has opened 41 branches in the Philippines since 2013, giving it a leading market share in the Philippine ramen restaurant market. Through interviews with executive decision-makers from both Japanese and Philippine partners, along with site visits and discussions with local operations managers, several thematic challenges are identified. These include menu development, transnational supply chain management, staff and manager training, and new store launches and the challenges of scaling-up. These data provide a window into management decision-making in a cross-cultural setting in a cultural product industry. The paper concludes that while it is important to recognize the distinct roles, competencies and challenges for Japanese and Philippine partners in this business, these attributes have changed as the partnership has evolved. As the ramen business rapidly internationalizes, this case study

provides a local example of all that goes into the processes of globalization. Further, the case study presents a convincing model that eschews the franchise approach to overseas cross-cultural expansion.

Keywords: Rahmen, supply chain, managerial strategy, overseas expansion

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Chambers of commerce serve as a bridge for understanding local socio-economic conditions and business dynamics.

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Investing abroad is a challenge. It requires exportable idea, location, resources, contractors, various contacts, etc. The key important is a good understanding and knowledge about foreign market, customer needs, business environment, law and customs. But in an extremely diverse social, cultural, political and even geographical world, it is extremely difficult to understand the specifics of a foreign market and its rules. The more distant geographically, culturally and politically the foreign market in question is the more difficult this task is. Local employees, consultants and government agencies can be helpful. But chambers of commerce should be considered as one of the most effective institutional interface and useful tool in international trade and investment. Chambers of commerce generally support companies and refer business positions in consultation processes to public institutions. Some of them also deliver public services and tasks of a non-authoritative and authoritative nature. They are business neutral and independent. However, it should be remembered that this is an extremely diverse ecosystem. This term is used collectively to refer to organizations with different methods of establishment, political and economical position, number of members, resources, tasks, area of operation, social perception and possibilities. Understanding the taxonomy and specifics of chambers and the principles of their operation in the country of potential investment or trade may constitute significant assets for a foreign company. The aim of the paper is to discuss, using specific examples, the taxonomy of chambers in the context of their usefulness in planning and implementing international trade and foreign investments.

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Geographies of Management Ideas

Alexander Kristiansen (Center for Asian Studies, Stockholm School of Economics)

The understanding of management ideas is important since they are antecedents to organisational change and shape firm practices. Following the globalisation of the economy, the dissemination of management ideas, such as Agile development and Lean production, has intensified through MNCs and global production networks. Despite the increased consensus on the importance of firm practices among economic geographers, limited attention has been given to management ideas that shape firms and their practices. Consequently, our understanding of how management ideas shape the geography of economic activity remains limited. An in-depth case study of the R&D organisation within an MNC is used to analyse the dissemination and materialisation of a management idea. Evidence-rich qualitative data with ethnographic observations collected at subsidiaries in China and Sweden provides insights on the spatial and organisational dissemination of a management idea from a geographic perspective.

Keywords: Management geography, management practices, management idea, agile