RESEARCH SEMINAR

Department of Geography and Resource Management
地理與資源管理學系

Why Geography Still Matters: Collaboration, Mobility and the Geography of Knowledge

29 OCT 2026 (THU) | **CKB 109 16:30-18:00**

Why does proximity remain so important for innovation when knowledge can be accessed from almost anywhere? This talk brings together three studies examining how geography shapes learning, technological development and engagement with scientific research. The first follows 1.7 million scholars and shows that local collaboration is associated with a greater likelihood of learning from collaborators—a premium that increased even as collaboration became more geographically dispersed. The second examines neighborhood technology clusters across 260 Chinese cities. I will show how clustering within cities is associated with faster technological diversification into related and more complex activities. I then turn to ongoing research on academic mobility. Comparing scholars who relocate with similar non-movers, I show that relocation redirects citation engagement towards the destination city without increasing its overall volume, largely through newly formed local collaborations. These gains reproduce the existing geographical concentration of scientific activity. Together, the studies show how local relationships shape who learns, which technologies places develop and whose research attracts attention. These three pieces of research have implications for regional innovation policy, academic recruitment and the spatial organization of science.

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Frank van der Wouden is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at The University of Hong Kong and a Research Affiliate at Northwestern University's Institute on Complex Systems. His research examines how collaboration, mobility and geographical proximity shape scientific and technological knowledge production. Combining large-scale publication and patent data with network and spatial analysis, his work connects economic geography, innovation studies and the science of science. He holds a PhD from UCLA and serves as an Associate Editor of Industry and Innovation.

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