



Smart specialization and institutional context: Towards a process of institutional discovery and change

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Institutions and regional development (i)

- Institutions are “ongoing and relatively stable **patterns of social practice** based on mutual expectations that owe their existence to either purposeful constitution or unintentional emergence” (Bathelt/Glückler 2014: 346, emphasis added)
- Institutions include customs, routines, attitudes, mentalities, (dis)trust, reputation, the affinity to cooperate or compete, personal relationships, social capital (Putnam 1993; 1995), or what is often vaguely called “culture”
- Institutions are different from **organizations** and **prescriptive rules** (e.g. laws)
- Institutions interact with organizations and prescriptive rules and change through **upward** or **downward causation** (Glückler/Lenz 2016)

Institutions and regional development (ii)

- Institutions condition innovation, growth and entrepreneurship processes (Glückler/Bathelt 2017)
- Policies have to be **institution-sensitive**
- RIS3 can be institution-sensitive in two ways:
 1. by defining **institution-consistent interventions**; or
 2. by foreseeing policies for **downward causation** of institutional change
- Policy processes (e.g. EDP) can lead to **upward causation** of institutional change through a change of routines or “culture”

A framework for institutional discovery and change

- The EDP can act as an **institutional discovery process** because stakeholders involved contribute their (tacit) knowledge on institutional context
 - ▶ *Institutional consistency*
 - ▶ *Evidence base for downward causation of institutional change*
- The EDP can act as an **institutional change process** either explicitly or implicitly
 - ▶ *Downward causation through policies defined in the RIS3*
 - ▶ *Upward causation through behavioral change during/after the EDP*

Lower Austria

- The current RIS3 follows lines set out by **previous regional innovation strategies**
- The RIS3 does not focus on sectoral priorities but builds on the **region's flagship programs for clusters and technology parks**
- The EDP and RIS3 implementation mainly rely on a **coordination process between regional government and intermediary organizations** (e.g. regional development agencies, chamber of economy)
- **Intermediary organizations** are in close touch with their client/member companies and have managed to build **trust and routines of cooperation**
- Through intermediate organizations' embeddedness in the regional economy (e.g. cluster managers, technopole managers, local chamber offices), the EDP has probably benefited from **considerable tacit knowledge on institutional context**

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Bolzano-Alto Adige (South Tyrol)

- The RIS3 follows lines set out by previous studies and initiatives, notably the **concept and focus areas of the new technology park**
- The EDP included **workshops, focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews**. Interviews established a trustful atmosphere that enabled information sharing by companies
- However, trust and cooperation existed before the EDP because of the small size of the regional economy, suggesting **close-knit social capital**
- Intermediary organizations enjoyed companies' trust and had tacit institutional knowledge due to **long-standing cluster and networking schemes**
- Still, the EDP was important in creating a new dynamic of cooperation by **making explicit the pre-existing, implicit consensus** on economic development
- Thus, the **formulation of a common vision** made tacit institutional knowledge explicit

Slovenia

- EDP and RIS3 were **approaches new to Slovenia**
- Due to the small size of the country, **some cooperation between agents existed** before the EDP
- After the economic crisis that hit Slovenia, there was a feeling that a **new vision of economic development was needed**. Thus, companies were interested to participate in the EDP
- The **danger of losing EU funding** due to the conditionality was another motivator since Slovenia's first RIS3 draft was rejected by the European Commission
- The **reputation enjoyed by key people** facilitated trust-building and cooperation during the EDP, facilitated by **intermediary organizations acting as trust brokers**
- **Cooperation among agents widened**, thus the EDP did not so much establish new routines than enhance existing ones

Croatia


- EDP and RIS3 were **approaches new to Croatia**
- The RIS3 does frequently address institutional questions by **calling for enhancing the innovation or entrepreneurial “culture” or attitudes**
- The EDP and the resulting RIS3 created **more stable expectations among companies**, compared to frequent changes of innovation policy previously
- The EDP changed behavior in university-industry collaboration by creating **more openness** on either side
- The EDP established **new routines of information exchange and coordination** between government ministries/agencies and with the private sector
- Company participation was **mediated through cluster organizations and the chamber of economy**, with the chamber’s local offices motivating companies to participate

Conclusions

- Explicit **institutional analysis is rare** but qualitative evidence gathered through interviews and focus-group discussions probably contributes (**tacit**) **knowledge on institutional context** to the EDP
- **Few RIS3 explicitly focus on downward causation** of institutional change
- For some regions (Lower Austria, South Tyrol), the institutional context was favorable even before 2014 due to a **long history of trust-building and cooperation** through intermediary organizations and clusters
- Regions/countries lacking these institutional conditions can use the EDP for **institutional leapfrogging**
- Through behavioral change (e.g. increased cooperation, participatory policymaking, vision building, trust-building) leading to upward causation of institutional change, the **process may be more important than the outcome**

Policy implications

- **Don't look at hard data only!**
Explicit institutional analysis can increase the institutional sensitivity of RIS3 and seize opportunities for downward causation of institutional change
- **Translate between institutional contexts!**
Instead of copying “best practices”, translating policies to a region's institutional context can be useful. Doing so requires understanding institutional differences between regions. Diasporas can help in making tacit institutional knowledge explicit
- **Take your time!**
Institutional change is a long-term process. Building trust and cooperation requires constant interaction. Institutionally embedded intermediary organizations can be highly effective in doing so
- **Don't underestimate the process!**
Even when RIS3 do not include radically new ideas, the EDP and participatory RIS3 implementation are a useful exercise new to some regions/countries



Thank you for your attention!

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