

KNOWLEDGE, INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY ACROSS BORDERS

Territorial innovation systems and strategies of collective efficiency

The case of Tagus Valley agro-food complex

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to show the relevance of territorial innovation systems approach for non-central regions' development strategies. The research made allowed to identify actions of collective efficiency to strengthen endogenous capacity for regional innovation, and also to detect some institutional weaknesses that inhibit the innovation dynamics in a particular rural region (Tagus Valley).

Design/methodology/approach – The research followed an interpretive case study, of explanatory type. Data collecting method comprised semi-structured face-to-face interviews with business agents and local government members, direct observation of innovation activities and documentary analysis. Statistical methods to analyse the firms' innovation behaviour, as well as owners and managers' perceptions, were also used in order to improve the trustworthiness of the research.

Findings – The results show that innovation is positively associated to a diverse set of institutional factors that shape a territorially embedded innovation system, in which the firms' innovation activity is chiefly based on localized learning processes. Moreover, a path of smart and creative diversification area is detected, but there are substantial differences between firms belonging to agro-food supply chain. While food industries and wineries show very interesting levels of investment in innovation activities and external knowledge synergies, farmers/producers depend greatly from producers' organizations.

Research limitations/implications – Given the absence of generalizability and some speculative argumentation, further research needs to be done, especially about the critical role of higher education institutions to promote innovation.

Practical implications – The paper provides empirical insights about the role of actors belonging to the governance layer inherent to the territorial innovation system in discussion.

Originality/value – The paper fulfils an identified need to systematize institutional factors able to affect non-central regions innovation.

Keywords Innovation systems, Collective efficiency strategies, Institutional thickness, Tagus Valley, Territorialized agro-food complex

Paper type Case study



1. Introduction

There has been a consensus, for decades, about the recognition of the special role of certain locations – in particular, urban areas – as poles of development valuing, in particular, the leadership of the metropolises as privileged centres in a globalized