

From Knowledge Networks to Inter-Regional Innovation Systems in the context of Devolution of Powers to Regions

Regional knowledge in terms of specialised skills and knowledge gained through experience and culture is used to implement innovation, which is essential in order to remain competitive and economically resilient in globalised business environments. Knowledge exchange among regional stakeholders and that between them and those in other regions have received growing attention particularly given the devolution of power to local governments across Europe and the need of regions to boost their economies and compete with those of others. Regions are aware of the need to collaborate with other regions in learning to achieve this purpose. So far studies have focused on networks of individual organisations from different regions rather than on learning between regional groups or associations of organisations. This is quite surprising especially given that these networks often receive public funding in addition to charging membership fees to boost regional economies and represent the interests of regions and their people. By studying the actual learning processes and knowledge exchange between these networks in relation to those among regions in each network will help us understand their role in generating new knowledge and using it for innovation. This will also result in providing some recommendations on how to improve these processes and the operation of their institutions. More specifically, the study will examine the structure, organisation and activities of such networks. By comparing them it will identify different types of such networks and how each type of networks, their organisation, structure and the ways each identified type of network operate in terms of sharing and exchanging knowledge with others.

It will also examine whether and to what extent these networks ‘behave’ like systems. When networks behave like systems they are characterised by identifiable competencies, feedback, common developmental objectives and geographical borders, which are important for managing and facilitating knowledge exchange and for designing new policies aimed at enhancing knowledge exchange. To increase the relevance of the study to many regions facing the same challenges worldwide, networks of regions in two countries, Poland and the UK were selected. This will allow examining regions in different geopolitical contexts; the networks in the UK will represent networks with regions where devolution of power from central governments to regional authorities is at an advanced stage and the importance of regions in collaborating with others is likely to increase even further after Brexit global Britain. By contrast, Polish networks represent regions in an EU country where devolution is still at the beginning. Finally, the study will benefit end users and policy makers by suggesting some policy implications for the management and operation of knowledge networks and systems in general and advancing knowledge exchange and innovation among regions in particular.