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New places of innovation, physical spaces for pooling services

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In the context of an increase of knowledge and intangible economy, the number of physical places encouraging cooperation between companies and workers is paradoxically rising, based on real estate and mobile infrastructure (hotel and business incubator, start-up accelerator, share of high-tech equipment, etc.), supplemented by a system for facilitating and providing ancillary services (reprography, catering, etc.). Also are emerging third-places, co-working and fab labs (often associated in the same place), as places between the classical workplace and home, but also third-party activities between paid employment and leisure, especially in the case of fab labs where amateur projects can lead to projects to create activities based on the produced value. Initiatives are provided by all kinds of stakeholders: companies, associations, consumers and users, public authorities.

In parallel with cluster policies based on incentives for collaboration, more flexible arrangements for the coordination and facilitation of socio-economic networks have emerged (Suire and Vicente, 2015), and one can note "the analogy between functioning of a cluster and third-places, which can be considered as "micro-clusters". Today, local systems tend to proceed by geographical grouping of actors in the perspective of finding solutions to common problems. They take various forms and are rather disordered, often grouped under the term "social innovations". We designate as a place of innovation all these hybrid spaces, halfway between the professional and the public spheres (Pin, 2016), which are intended to structure innovative collective initiatives (Suire and Vicente, 2015). Innovation is more about approaches and organizations but can also provide technical innovations. These are ecosystems based on the implementation of collaborative projects and synergies between actors.

The creation of these places is based on the motivation of actors involved in innovative clusters, but is increasingly carried by local authorities in search of a renewal of their policy of territorial development and economic attractiveness. In any case, these places are based on the mobilization of private actors and the involvement of public actors, with the will to create collaborative projects, beyond the construction of infrastructures (buildings, etc.). These places are not reserved for metropolitan areas: they spread to the medium and small towns that liven up the countryside. They often constitute a bridge between secondary cities and main urban areas by being points of connection between them.

Third-places are a spaces where temporary proximities are mainly constructed (Torre, 2008) and where the specific relational assets are built, but can also constitute more perennial proximities, notably through the co-location of actors and the daily use of materials and tools.

We have produced about ten monographs on innovative projects comprising:

- Clusters, characterized by a service offering materialized in a physical location, unlike most clusters where the supply of services is rather intangible (networks, etc.),
- Initiatives carried out by local and regional authorities, organized on an inter-communal scale and aimed at inter-firms cooperation,
- Initiatives originating from private actors and supported by public funding.

We have thus observed numerous experiences of mutualizing services to companies in physical places: access to infrastructures, support for cultural enterprises, digital development, business incubators, premises of 1st transformation, co-working, fab labs...

The study identifies:

- The motivations that led to the creation of places of innovation,
- Types of projects,
- The stages of implementation,
- The number of companies or users concerned,
- The conditions for implementation, in particular financial,
- Key success factors and difficulties.

The most effective operations are those based on the pooling of different experiences, and different means. In a sense, the most convincing experiments are those which sum up the various tools, or at least some of them; and wide opened to collaborations and experiments, without too much exclusivity.

We identify the development of real devices, in the sense of M. Foucault (2004), as heterogeneous sets made up of discourses, people, institutions, arrangements, rules and laws, etc. which make sense, and are anchored in a territory. Thus, it is not only a matter of mobilizing different forms of sharing or building innovation, but also of adding elements such as project financing, obtaining a dedicated, adapted and equipped place, the definition of working or sharing rules, the existence of an appropriate governance structure, and the diversity of participants or stakeholders (from individuals to public stakeholders, companies or associations).

Key-words (5)

Territorial development, innovation system, firms, clusters, proximity.

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