

Territorial strategies for smart rural perspectives

The aim of this presentation is to propose an analytical grid of the territorial strategy developed by agricultural cooperatives. A framework for cooperative relationship development in innovation and knowledge contexts is based on interdependency of cluster members' strategies with each other, especially agribusiness and agro-food valorization (Torre and Wallet, 2014). Starting with smart specialization in agriculture and agri-food sectors on a local area (Torre, 2015; Capello, 2007), the paper mobilizes literature in order to provide indicators and measurement of the clustering impact to foster competitiveness of cooperatives.

Agricultural cooperatives are major actors of rural development in all countries (Cogeca, 2010). In France, 2,600 agricultural co-ops generate 86 billions of turnover, and have more than 165,000 employees in agriculture and agro-food chains (Coop de France, 2015). They combine local anchorage and international markets under competitive pressure. Thus, cooperatives, through their positioning in the food-processing value-chain, have a competitive edge (Chaddad and Cook, 2004): one which is based on their mastering of territorial anchorage and on the renewal of more sustainably and environmentally oriented agricultural and food systems. In this perspective, eco-systemic services as well as sponsoring local activities (social events, gastronomic moments as well as celebrations) participate in the identification and reinforcement of the similarity logic of organized proximity. The analyze of the determinants of collective action and various alliances between such social enterprises and other partners can support a useful and sustainable model. French agricultural cooperatives, which represent three out of four farmers, have become powerful actors in the organization of supply chains, with around 60% in wholesale trade and 40% for marketing. They are strongly rooted regionally with 73% of the headquarters located in the regions outside Paris. They are influential enterprises for creating jobs in rural areas, giving farmers access to markets, employing woman and young people.

Our methodology is based on a regional case study. It aims to analyze how agricultural cooperatives have transformed their initial territory into smart development. Cooperatives are engaged not only in terms of production and agri-food transformation, but also in terms of incomes' distribution, direct and indirect employment, social capital assets and local projects. Different tools are used, like geographical signs, local projects as well as products and processes innovations. Facing an international market competition, they combine different types of knowledge to create process and product innovations. Their strategies indicate territorial differentiation combined with local governance. The data used in the analysis of the region stems from public statistical office (Agreste - INSEE, Agricultural Chamber and Agricultural cooperative Federation). The selection of cooperatives was based on their contribution to Landes Region according to selective criteria (size, type of production, local-international market positioning) for testing our hypothesis. Additionally, interviews were conducted with other local authorities in order to complete cooperative ones. The questionnaire itself revolved around five broad main topics: firm networks within and beyond the region, the regional supply chain, innovation activities of the firm, competitiveness of the firm, as well as general characteristics of the region that are potentially beneficial or harmful for the respective firm. How do these enterprises foster a more sustainable mobilization of resources, improved cooperation between operators along the value chain and/or across traditional and developing sectors (e.g. via clusters/platforms), and lead to new products or services, and the recycling or up-cycling of materials?

Our results give patterns for collective action by the way of analytical grid using the proximity notion (Boschma, 2005; Torre and Rallet, 2005). The case study shows that the partnership is heterogeneous with a distinction between the local level (for sponsoring including social local life) and the regional level for products and projects (including an economic logic). Smart sustainability is a common goal for actors both public and private. External knowledge and interactions, in terms of e.g. collaborations,

are important for sustainable development. SMEs commonly lack important internal resources and capabilities for innovation, such as human capital and finances. As large and small agricultural cooperatives develop different territorial strategies in favor of the creation of local added values: quality sign, proximity - short supply chains, environmental protections, collaborative platforms, new knowledge and social innovations, their capacity to create “cooperative” strategies with other local stakeholders is essential. By choice or necessity, they are more and more engaged in local collective actions with other partners as well as in added-value supply chains (Cook and Chaddad, 2004). Contributing to services for members obliges social enterprises, even if cooperatives have created large group organizations, to be closer to their farmer members (Ostrom, 1990). In this perspective, territory is an important source for the commitments between owner-members and cooperatives and for the creation of added-value in sustainable supply chains (Filippi, 2014). Cooperatives organize interactions between farmers and their enterprises and them with other stakeholders in agro-food including advisory enterprises as well as consumers and non-consumers (for rupture innovation). The way to design all the interdependencies is essential in order to better understand the key determinants of collective action for new collaborative business model. These results contribute to give some indications to the setting of a new development policy for rural regions. We will address the question of both territorial and multi-level governance illustrating the diversity of potential smart development issues for a future rural Europe.

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