

How middle-sized cities deliver innovative milieus?

Innovation exists outside the metropolis

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Innovation: a liquid definition

Territorial innovation corresponds to innovation by all the players in the territory, at the service of local development. Territorial innovation is broader than technical innovation. It aims at the sustainable and inclusive development of the territory and its populations, seeking answers to the challenges of economic growth and social cohesion as well as the stakes linked to transitions (demographic, ecological and energy and digital transition). Territorial innovation corresponds to all new answers, technological or not, to needs expressed in a given territory.

How do local authorities, in particular medium-sized cities, position themselves as facilitators and stimulators for innovation? What conditions enable the local public and private players of the territory to innovate? How can we create and sustain innovative and open ecosystems, bringing together the diversity of the players so that they can meet, understand and cooperate? How can we foster "working together" and co-construction, a climate of trust, open and cross-cutting R&D systems, hybridization of models and resources?

Obstacles to overcome

The territories are full of interesting initiatives but their knowledge remains fragmented and globally insufficient. At the territorial level, innovation is carried by a multitude of actors operating in different and relatively compartmentalized spheres. This inhibits capitalization and promotes the reproduction of micro-models rather than a dynamics of change of scale benefiting the territory on which they develop but also to all the territories over which they could potentially impact.

Therefore, the priority is not so much the deployment of new technological solutions, it is in setting new governance mechanisms at the scale of mid-sized city, with a strong attention to the conditions for a creative and supportive local ecosystem of innovation and to accompany the shift of the local economic sector towards the adoption of 4.0 technologies.

The final outcome is to unlock the potential of social innovation and grassroots initiatives in jobs and value creation.

Middle-sized cities: conflict or complementarity with larger cities

Europe is a territory of predominantly medium-sized and small cities that intend to exist vis-à-vis the big cities and metropolises accused of "aspiring" talents and resources and to hinder the innovation potential of the intermediate territories. In England the Government recognised that the current singular focus on large core cities is too narrow to promote genuine economic and technological development, social wellbeing and environmental resilience. In Germany the demand for autonomy has led the German medium-sized towns to claim a specific place in the development by asserting themselves as "regional city":

The International Urban Development Association - INTA - is a global membership association where public and private policy-makers and urban practitioners come together to share knowledge, experience and performing tools for integrated urban development.

Since 1975 INTA is an unparalleled network bringing together the major actors in urban development to jointly establish new parameters for sustainable and integrated development of urbanised areas. INTA capitalizes on the skills of its membership: policymakers of national, regional and local government; business leaders in real estate development, construction, engineering, service provision, product development; preeminent thinkers and research institutes; influential architecture and urbanism firms. Unlike other associations, INTA's comprehensive approach to urban development allows to work across sectors, departments and disciplines. Thanks to its active, generous and diverse membership, INTA, over the last decades, released new opportunities for cities and regions and encouraged further collaboration between urban stakeholders by identifying inclusive links between punctual projects managed by diverse actors. As a non-profit organisation, INTA can operate beyond political horizons to identify long-term strategies to maintain and increase a region's economic competitiveness and quality of life.