

The Role of the State in the New Generation of Innovation: a Multi-Scalar Perspective

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Innovation has long been seen as one of the main drivers of regional or national economic development, and therefore believed to improve the overall economic wellness of citizens all around the world. However, the current generation of innovation (e.g., artificial intelligence, radical innovations in green and/or manufacturing technologies, digitalization, etc.) is much more complex than the previous generations as it is characterized by high uncertainty, high risk and high speed of iteration. Moreover, high hopes are put on innovation, or innovation-based activities, in solving many of the grand societal challenges, such as climate change, demographic changes, the widening of digital gaps, environmental deterioration, and the loss of biodiversity, etc. In this context, the states have increasingly been expected to play a more important role in facilitating the new generation of innovation, as the complexity of innovation requires various resources and actors that are beyond the reach of individual firms. Among others, mission-oriented innovation policies have become increasingly popular among policy-makers at several spatial levels, both in coordinated and liberal market economies (Block, 2008; Kattel & Mazzucato 2018; Mazzucato 2018; Coenen et al. 2015; Morgan 2018). In contrast to previous generations of mission-oriented innovation policies, which aimed for instance at nuclear and defence-related projects and were strongly centrally steered and controlled by governmental organizations in a top-down way, the new generation is supposed to be more bottom-up, decentralized and focusing on experimentation and learning among a broader group of actors, including niche actors. However, what role regions are supposed to play in this new generation of innovation policies is relatively unclear. How are missions shaped and interpreted at the regional level? What are the policy levers available to regions to address those missions? Arguably, some of the broader group of actors, such as experimenting niche actors can be particularly found at the local and regional level, where they can play a role in regional innovation policies (Tödting & Trippel 2018, Uyarra et al. 2019), smart specialization (Foray 2018; Morgan & Marques, 2019) and new path development. These niche actors are embedded in different national contexts for innovation, as well as varieties of capitalism (Jackson & Deeg 2019).

On the other hand, there has also long been a discussion about the potential drawbacks of state intervention and state involvement in innovation. Such debates on the pros and cons of the role of states in innovation have been well covered by previous discussions on 'state versus market' or 'centralized versus decentralized decision making', etc. In the new generation of innovation, we also see a lot of value in bringing these 'old' topics back to the discussion table.

Reflecting upon the discussions above, this special session aims at analyzing and comparing the role of the states in the current generation of innovation from a multi-scalar perspective. It focuses on both the conventional (i.e., in contributing to economic growth and employment opportunities) and the new (i.e., in solving grand social challenges) roles of the state in contributing to the new generation of innovation. In particular, we welcome submissions that deal with, but are not necessarily constrained to the following questions:

- What are the pros and cons of involving regional and national states in the current generation of innovation?
- What impact do varieties of capitalism have on the success (or failure) of certain innovations in certain countries or regions?

- How can states stimulate innovation and spread its benefits more evenly in society?
- How do state actors deal with conflicts between economic and the social aspects of specific innovations?
- What is the leeway of local and regional actors to influence mission-oriented policies?
- How can smart specialization and the related entrepreneurial discovery processes affect mission-oriented innovation policies?
- Do policy scales differ in their importance according to the kind of grand challenge that is supposed to be tackled by innovation policy?

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