
Editorial

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Helena Santos-Rodrigues holds a European PhD in Business Management Science by the Vigo University. She was granted with two research awards and is doing a post PhD at ITI, USA. Her research interests include knowledge management, intellectual capital and its relation with business performance with international environment. Her work has been published in *Investigaciones Europeas de Dirección y Economía de la Empresa*, *Int. J. of Transitions and Innovation Systems*, *International Business & Economics Research Journal*, *International Journal of Engineering and Industrial Management*, and *Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management*, among others. She has also been a grant holder of several EU funded projects related with knowledge transfer, innovation and sustainable competitive advantage.

Throughout the editorial of this journal's inaugural issue in 2010, its Chief Editor Marina Dabic claimed clearly the relevance of innovation and knowledge for transitional economies to compete today.

“[...]Catching up innovation and development are a major area of concern for transition countries and for the economic future and growth of both developed countries and transition countries.” [Dabic, (2010), p.1]

The latter statement raises implicitly the big question related with the ‘how’s’. Since then, several papers have tried to shed some light on a extremely complex and multifaceted question: how can transitional economies foster innovation-based growth? How can this process be boosted, if possible? How this can be achieved when SMEs are predominant in such economies?

With the latter questions in mind, one just needs to go back again to the theory of the systems of innovation to realise that there is not an optimal solution. In the old debate of national versus regional systems of innovation, Nelson (1993) concluded that no optimal system of innovation exists, since different trajectories in different countries had obtained similar results. Its structure and configuration depends highly on the existing wickers at an area to build the system, i.e., institutional agents such as universities, technological centres, and the like on one hand, and on the other hand the enterprises. That system should be understood as Freeman (1987) tried to define it: the network of institutions from both the private and public sector, whose activities and interactions start, import, modify and diffuse new technologies. Therefore, the system of innovation is part of the environment where SMEs are embedded.

In such environment, learning effect and knowledge value are keys to innovate (Lundvall, 1992, 2010; Lundvall et al., 2002). Efficiency at the innovation process is determined in a higher extent by the interactions among the different elements of the system of innovation (Lundvall, 1992, 2010; Nelson, 1993; Freeman and Soete, 1997). Therefore, we should centre our attention in how to boost the process of knowledge spillovers and in how to leverage it.

In researching the knowledge spillover effect, Rodríguez-Pose and Crescenzi (2008, p.65) find that:

“[...]not only knowledge flowing from neighbouring regions improves regional growth performance, but also that spillovers are geographically bounded and that there is a strong distance decay effect, which in the European case expands to more or less a 200 km radius. These outcomes shed additional light on the role of geography in the process of innovation, by supporting the idea of an existing tension between two forces: the increasingly homogeneous availability of standard ‘codified’ knowledge and the spatial boundedness of ‘tacit’ knowledge and contextual factors.”

Therefore, perhaps a type of approach may be missed in the discourse of systems of innovation, emerging from the Marshallian districts approach and achieving an increasing relevance in recent years: clusters. It is fairly than possible that this type of territorial agglomeration of firms may shed some light on a better understanding of some barriers hindering knowledge flows within a system of innovation, as González-Loureiro and Figueroa-Dorrego (2010, 2012) shows in a concrete region of a developed economy. The latter authors emphasise the lack of influence that the institutional system of innovation had on SMEs’ growth over an expansive business cycle (2002–2005).

If this happens in innovation-based economies then, what could be happening in transitional? And, are emerging economies different to transitional ones in what regard this question? Both share the difficulties of the scarcity in resources and experience. Furthermore, developed economies really need for a balanced growth and development of both of the latter economies in the current globalised marketplace. Hence, will be the

cluster approach the solution to the system of innovation problems? What role should play such territorial agglomerations in either transitional and emerging economies or areas? Is there an optimal model of territorially agglomerating firms for seizing the knowledge spillover effect? Some studies show how sharing intangible, knowledge-based elements can really improve competitiveness through innovativeness, and even jumping national borders just like Santos-Rodrigues et al. (2011) proved in the case of the automotive industry in the Euro-Region of Galicia and Northern Portugal.

Undoubtedly, sharing knowledge is also a risky activity. The open innovation paradigm also discussed in a previous special issue in this journal (see Vol. 2, No. 2, 2012) introduces clearly the problem: the intellectual property rights. Therefore, what are the risks inherent in managing intellectual capital in agglomerated economies? How can we manage them? And even, how can we catch the underlying mutual effects within clusters?

With all these concerns in mind, we aimed this special issue in order to shed some light on the background of these three pillars systems of innovation, clusters, intangible management, in what is called to be the next stage of the economies for competing: efficiency while innovating and cooperating, with an especial perspective from the SMEs viewpoint. Entitled as 'Clusters, system of innovation and intangible for fostering growth: finding the keys for SMEs in transitional and emerging economies', five papers address the main challenges. Their authors are F. Xavier Molina-Morales and Elisa Giuliani; Susanne Durst; Anna Bykova and Mariya Molodchik; Borja Portero, José Luis Hervás-Oliver and Francisco Puig; and Roswitha Wiedenhofer.

The first article is entitled 'The cluster model: whether and what developing countries should learn from advanced countries', elaborated by Molina-Morales and Giuliani. This article opens perfectly the key questions abovementioned. It discusses the potential use of the cluster model within developing countries. Although nor the model itself neither its application in the context of emerging or transitional countries is new, the reflection about what still remains elusive to our understanding has been underestimated to date. Perhaps, more empirical and eclectic approaches would help to paste the usually fragmented results in evolving research. Additionally, as it usually happens in business management sciences, context-dependency challenges the validity of universalistic models and trajectories. And so do cluster as a topic of research from developing to either transitional or emerging countries. Authors' findings and reflections point out some commonalities when moving from one to any other scenario. Over their review, intangible elements emerge as determinant factors for succeeding in building a cluster, such as identity, shared values, cooperation and trustworthiness. The relational capital of a cluster becomes, therefore, crucial, irrespectively the type of context. However, different challenges arise from each context's particular characteristics. How local-producers may escape from the lock-in trick in where they are embedded seems to be one of the relevant questions for future research. We could even widen the topic from the consideration of globalisation as two faces of the same coin. The role of MNEs as members of a cluster may help to break some of the barriers identified by authors throughout their article. More empirical research is still needed in order to theorise properly above this phenomena in such a complex context as emerging and transitional economies are. Anyway, authors clearly highlight the role that knowledge and its spillovers may play as an argument to theorise about the dynamics of clusters in these contexts.

Meanwhile, the article presented by Durst, entitled 'Innovation and intellectual capital (risk) management in small and medium-sized enterprises', addresses a critical issue usually disregarded over literature: the inherent risks of sharing knowledge while innovating, particularly when speaking about SMEs. If the first article encourages seizing the cluster effect as a source of advantages in a globalised context, this second one deals with an emerging, relevant question usually hindering the knowledge spillover effect within clusters: the risky side of innovation, calling for more eclectic approaches. This emerging field of research is particularly relevant in emerging and transitional economies in their road to become innovation-based economies. Due to its emergence, author can only provide some general principles in order to begin researching particular cases. Therefore, Durst opens a wide research avenue. When addressing emerging topics of research, scholars usually find the tools and principles in the intersections of other topics and, subsequently, they have to search for mediator and moderator effects firstly, the circumstances under which things happen, prior to achieve general principles. So do Durst, finding and introducing the relevant approaches on which base future research: intellectual capital management, SMEs main characteristics, innovation and their inherent risks. Durst provides a fruitful framework and identify a number of risks that should be bear in mind for future research. SMEs are increasingly being told to innovate. However, it seems that practitioners have not appropriate tools for managing such risks. Therefore, we can say that both knowledge spillover and cluster effects may be nullified if governments and managers of supporting innovation institutions do not count on this relevant barrier. All in all, a relevant need for empirical research emerges from this article, which also may need an approach from the cluster topic within the system of innovation context.

Bykova and Molodchik's paper is entitled 'How to catch mutual effects in clusters: comparative study of transitional and developed economies'. After two mainly theoretical papers, this one addresses some of the abovementioned issues empirically. Fruitfully, they compare the case of transitional and emerging economies, splitting the factors in three big aspects: internal features, the system of innovation as part of the cluster environment, and cluster membership. Their study is rooted in the heterogeneous performance that several authors found among some organisational systems (be this industries, agglomerations or nations/economies), particularly in terms of network activity outcomes. As they emphasise, research have obtained some contradictory results regarding the effect of cluster membership on firms, and even the mutual benefits that may exist in that relationship. Their study shed some light on the factors influencing such mutual effects from the empirical evidence they found. Thanks to the background reviewed, they provide some insights on the existing differences between transitional and developed countries in terms of how cluster may act as an enhancer of innovation capability and value growth. In reviewing some empirical works, some contradictory seems to emerge. For instance, while some investigations found that either relational or social capital have not a role on knowledge production or innovation, others found the opposite. Again, contextual-dependency seems to be in the background of these confronted results. From this basis, authors test and compare results between developed and transitional countries. They provide promising results about the effect of cluster participation on innovation potential and companies' value creation. Bearing in mind some of their results, they find the somehow unexpected challenge of explaining why transitional economies offer more significant results than developed countries. As far as environmental factors really play a pivotal role in both

transitional and developed economies, knowing that enterprises operate in such different contexts, they suggest a number of new research avenues for fostering the mutual benefits in clusters. Hence, we believe, an institutional approach might offer more suitable foundations for keeping on exploring these evidences. We also believe that it is worthy to mention the relevant nuance in how authors deal with the operationalisation of cluster variables: it is 'participation' instead of 'membership' what really makes the difference. Again, it appears that knowledge spillovers comes to the fore since an enterprise may decide belonging to a cluster, but no impact can be expected if it decides not playing an active role in generating benefits and risks of cluster membership. Therefore, we believe that the existence of knowledge spillovers effects is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for a cluster having a positive impact on embedded firms. A conscious process of building jointly an advantage is still required in leveraging cluster participation.

Location, as shown in the latter article, is a determinant decision affecting firms' performance. Therefore, the fact of supporting excellent world-class clusters may be considered as a suitable public policy for economic growth in transitional economies. Nevertheless, the latter idea would remain incomplete if not added a perspective of multi-location and internationalisation complexity. Such is the question addressed by Portero, Hervás-Oliver and Puig in their paper entitled 'Critical intangible factors for SME multi-location strategy in China'. They deal with the topic from the perspective of how managers make their decisions in order to reduce uncertainty and gain further knowledge of a still unknown context. This put the focus on attitudinal aspects of the key human capital, managers, and their judgement capabilities. Three key dimensions are explored: the type/mode of agreement (ownership), the location area in the destination country (location) and the strategic reasons under a well-known internalisation theory of enterprises becoming multinationals. This original approach of multi-location is particularly relevant when investigating large areas such the Chinese market and even for its extension to free trade areas such as European Union, Mercosur and the like. This approach may be extremely useful for dealing with the internal heterogeneity of target areas. Their study from the viewpoint of Spanish firms locating in China is an example of how globalisation pushes firms to compete internationally. Implicitly, this emphasises the role of knowledge in the internationalisation process, likewise firms do when speaking about the innovation process: the sooner the firm gains relevant knowledge, the better. Over this process, authors emphasise the role of expatriates, the key human capital in the end. From their findings, one questions whether the cluster effect really exists in this type of countries and, if so, then to what extent it plays a role in location and multi-location strategies. While the emergence of a cluster seems to be a tool for increasing their firms' competitiveness in the case of developed countries, it is not so clear in cases like China. Cluster's benefits may have not an influence on location and multi-location strategies in this type of economies. This calls for further empirical and theoretical research. We believe that, according to the extant literature on clusters, its existence may be determinant in speeding up knowledge acquisition and absorption in those economies, so that headquarters searching for new locations would prefer clustering locations.

The fifth article of this special issue is authored by Wiedenhofer and is entitled 'Key drivers of technological innovation: intellectual capital view approach'. This mainly applied and empirical paper provides an example of how key innovation drivers may be useful for understanding technological innovation as a process. The indicators are applied

to high-tech industries in Austria. Therefore, the article provides an interesting methodology to select indicators, mainly for public decision-makers to develop accordingly supporting policies. It hence completes the circle from the viewpoint of the institutional system for supporting innovation. She adopted and suggests for future research different approaches to deal with the cluster effect, ranging from industrial districts, innovative milieus, systems of innovation to learning regions, among others. She identifies a number of driven factors affecting innovation, categorised into human, structural and relational capital. The latter are related to the creation of knowledge. Further theoretical and empirical research is required to test the validity of the measures to transitional or emerging economies, since local conditions may differ within the so-called context-dependency argument.

All in all, there is a clear intangible issue underlying under the knowledge spillover effect within clusters, in terms of how it can add value for firms, i.e., creating value while relating in a virtuous spiral of smart growth. The latter is not independent of the context where it happens, which may help to understand heterogeneous results. The intangible capital approach could be appropriate for addressing this question. Intangible management have become a driver for creating and maintaining sustainable competitive advantages (Sveiby, 2001; Viedma Marti, 2001; Yi and Davey, 2010). Then it follows that both system of innovation and cluster become the environment, while intangible management is the process that scholars are suggested to consider when investigating growth and success factors in either transitional or developing economies.

We hope that this special issue help to answer as many questions as it opens, encouraging scholars to follow the lines opened for achieving a smart growth on transitional and emerging economies.

We would like to end our editorial with an insight already provided by Lundvall et al. (2002, p.228), emphasising the role of innovation in answering and meeting the social needs for a sustained growth, a reflection that may guide the efforts of both countries and scholars:

“[...]the production of intellectual capital (learning) is strongly dependent on social capital[...]” so that “[...]A development strategy that focuses only on production capital and intellectual capital is not sustainable.”

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