
Editorial

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1 Introduction

This special issue has been inspired by the activities and results of the 'Knowledge intelligence and innovation for a sustainable growth – KnowInG'¹ project.

Despite recognition in high profile European policies and strategies (e.g., Europe 2020) that creativity and innovation supports economic growth, significant gaps currently exist in regional innovation policies, actors and tools across regions of the Mediterranean that could hinder economic development.

The considerable economic crisis is raising new challenges for the different sectors of the European and, in particular, Mediterranean regions, involving cultural, social and economic factors aimed to be used creativity to develop new knowledge and innovation

in production, business activities, policies, culture and social environments. The project, 'Knowledge intelligence and innovation for a sustainable growth – KnowInG' (funded by the STC programme MED), promoted the enhancement of cooperation among key institutional and economic actors and the 'knowledge economy' by launching a transnational dialogue platform on policies, tools and strategies for attracting and creating 'innovation'. Creativity, policies, tools, actors, knowledge and innovation are the axes of research of the project.

In this context, starting from experiences of the project, the Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche of Italy (CNR) promoted this special issue with the aims to stimulate scientific debate for the emergence of new models of policies involving actors from local to transnational levels, and new tools enhancing processes of knowledge building and sharing using virtual innovation environments.

Recognising that regional prosperity depends on a region's capacity to support innovative businesses, institutions and people the key issues to be addressed in order to close gaps in innovation include:

- improving governance of innovation needs
- enhancing cooperation of key institutional and economic actors in terms of creating new territorial development policies
- promoting our knowledge economy through a new transnational dialogue-platform on policies, tools and strategies that attract and generate innovation and creativity
- encouraging new creative clusters and to internationalise knowledge-intensive businesses.

2 Knowledge economy and creative industries

When Peter Drucker coined the term 'knowledge maker' more than 50 years ago, it was already evident that knowledge would be the most important factor in the world's future development. It was vital that the world moves beyond the classical theory that the traditional factors of land, labour and capital were fundamental to development, and embrace the theory that knowledge is more and more the most important factor. Also, continuous technological development of the 20th century was transforming the majority of wealth-creating work from physical-based to knowledge-based.

Today, economic exchanges are moving away from the traditional national scale of governance. This is crucially linked to changes in production and trade, which are increasingly associated with knowledge-based activities. In fact, technology and knowledge are the key factors of production. Mobility of information was increased and a global workforce has been developed, resulting in knowledge and expertise being transported instantaneously around the world. This has also impacted on commercial competition; any advantage gained by one company can be eliminated overnight by rapid, competitive improvements. Also, since we are now an information society, knowledge management is absolutely essential for economic growth.

Ideally, companies need to take a strategic look at the following elements in order to stay ahead of the curve and gain a competitive advantage over their counterparts by focusing on:

- their process of innovation
- combining market and technology
- supporting know-how and creative talents of knowledge workers
- their ability to derive value from information.

The knowledge economy comprises economic synergies across multiple economic sectors such as the industries that develop from individual creativity, skill and talent, and have potential for wealth and job creation. These creative industries, directly or indirectly, produce cultural products and include commercial enterprises as well as artistic, public and not-for-profit organisations.

3 Support for European innovation and creativity as an economic driving force

In the context of the Lisbon Strategy², which aims to encourage scientific and technological innovation, the European Commission has underlined the importance of creativity: if knowledge is seen as ‘the motor of the sustainable growth’, then ‘education and research, innovation and creativity are the keywords for a high-speed transformation world’. The same keywords are re-proposed in the 2020 strategy, for future years³.

The Europe Union also gives directions for regional policies: it is necessary to take care of and to pay attention to the creative industries because they have positive repercussions on other sectors. It also expresses some key concepts can incentivise the creative industries to:

- attract talent
- stimulate interaction between culture, development and territory
- support networking
- coordinate between institutions
- develop of planning skills
- select services and beneficiaries
- valorise their territory on a global level
- improve collaboration between research and business
- put more value on the significance of skills enhancement, education and training.

Digital technology is also a key factor to innovation. In 2010, a study entitled ‘Joint research agenda for ICT innovations and creative industries’, written for the CReATE project and funded by the European Commission, identifies digital creativity as a strategic resource for re-launching the economy and facing future development challenges.

The study was inspired by the Europe 2020 programme, which sees digital resources and creative industries playing a key role in the development of the economy and society this decade. The programme sees this happening by establishing strong connections

between the traditional fields of cultural production (such as agriculture) and technological advancements in these fields, and the strengthening of connections between mass media and digital media.

In fact, the issue of digital media and the creative sector is also highlighted in the speech 'Creativity for the creative sector: entertaining Europe in the electronic age' from 24th January 2012, by European Commission Vice President Neelie Kroes. In it she focuses on 'opportunities for the creative sector in the online age'. She states: "the sector offers our rich cultural heritage a proud platform; our people an opportunity for self-expression; our economy a much-needed boost. And the digital era brings vast opportunities: I want the creative sector to make the most out of them."

4 Examining the innovation landscape

In these special issues, seven different regional experiences from seven different countries (Italy, France, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Mexico and Slovenia) are presented. The papers illustrate different approaches for managing innovation approaches and how these approaches have been developed and adapted taking into account the regional specificities.

Since innovation and creativity has become a key vehicle for economic growth in Europe, knowledge-intensive activities (i.e., knowledge or creative clusters) are of growing importance within the innovation and enterprise landscapes. These activities comprise cultural industries, high-tech branches, higher education institutions, research centres and advanced producer services.

In Europe, regional knowledge clusters are seen as key drivers for competitiveness, innovation and regional development. Therefore, they are promoted through national and regional-level measures and through EU-level support instruments.

In particular, an important aspect highlighted by the papers is the necessity of moving away from the traditional, physical-based industries, to the more current knowledge-based sectors (e.g., technology and creative sectors), which support economic growth. Subsequently, this shift in the economy's perspective will lead to the growing need for creative and innovation clusters, which make mutual links at regional, transnational and international level so businesses can share, learn, create and innovate with each other.

Notes

- 1 The knowledge intelligence and innovation for a sustainable growth project (KnowInG) is funded by the Secrétariat Technique Conjoint programme, MED7, and launched in June 2010. It is delivered by project partners in seven of the MED Programme territories: Spain, Italy (comprising three regions), Portugal, Greece, and the UK.
- 2 The Lisbon Strategy was an action and development plan devised in 2000, for the economy of the European Union between 2000 and 2010. Its aim was to make the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion', by 2010. It was set out by the European Council in Lisbon in March 2000. http://ec.europa.eu/archives/growthandjobs_2009/objectives/index_en.htm.

- 3 Europe 2020 is a ten-year strategy, proposed by the European Commission on 3 March 2010 for advancement of the economy of the European Union. It aims at 'smart, sustainable, inclusive growth' with greater coordination of national and European policy. It follows the Lisbon Strategy for the period 2000–2010.