



Relational perspectives on business innovation – a biographical approach

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Outline of presentation [and dissertation]

Framing my research:

- research questions
- theoretical background
- conceptual framework

Methodological approach:

- study design: multiple cases, comparative analysis
- innovation biographies: main empirical instrument
- selection processes
- → focus on challenges of methodological proceedings

Analytical proceedings

- illustration of one innovation biography

First indications/results and wider reflections

Framing my research

Research questions: practices and strategies businesses located in *peripheral* settings adopt

- (1) in response to peripheralisation processes [meso-firm level]
- (2) for innovation activities [micro-process level]

Theoretical background

- theory on innovation: knowledge foundation, interaction; process view
- innovation & space
 - 'geography' of innovation': agglomeration arguments, spatial bias and label (re)production
 - 'geographies' of innovation'; multi-local nature, no pre-definition of places and scales

Conceptual framework – relational approach

- network perspectives: how firms interact with their environments
- relational understandings of proximity: network formation and evolvment

Methodological approach [study design]

	ESTONIA	SAXONY	
	'South Estonia'	Erzgebirgskreis	
[REGIONAL] CONTEXTS	Desk research Statistical data Literature Interviews	Desk research Statistical data Literature Interviews	➔
REGIONAL KEY INFORMANTS	Interviews Desk research	Interviews Desk research	➔
FOCAL COMPANIES	Interviews Desk research	Interviews Desk research	➔
COLLABORATION PARTNERS	Interviews Desk research	Interviews Desk research	➔
[REGIONAL] CONTEXTS	Desk research Statistical data Literature Interviews	Desk research Statistical data Literature Interviews	➔
	↓	↓	
	case specific analyses		➔

Cross case analysis

Overview on study design:

methodological position, triangulation

multiple cases (2); comparative approach

different informants and scales involved

Methodological approach [innovation biographies]

Inspiration/guidance by innovation biographies approach;

- micro level unit of analysis: projects/processes
- '*full picture*' on main actors, expertise & localities, dynamics

Methodological building blocks

- narrative interviews [with key individuals]
- triangulation [of sources and material]
- network analysis
- → adaptations for my project

Challenges for/from fieldwork

- access and availability, accuracy of responses
- interviews situations:
 - addressing project [RQ2] & firm level [RQ1] during interviews;
 - multiple interviewees in same interview: can work/can fail
- '*full picture*' vs. subjectivity and sometimes hidden agenda/specific interests of key informants; when is a picture a *full picture*?

Methodological approach [selection]

Selection processes: regions, businesses, projects



case study regions

regional starting points for enquiry: homogeneous sampling

based on statistical indicators:

- economic stagnation
- population decline
- geo. outside location

- Pre-definition of peripheral settings;
+ comparability across contexts [EE | SAX]

businesses

variation sampling

identification & selection based on:

- local experts
- data bases
- media and field observation

- potential bias towards active and visible businesses

projects/processes

variation sampling

selection mostly up to business reps.

- start-ups: process of setting up business

- bias towards successes?
+ reduced researcher bias?
+ cross section of projects;
yielded wide range of projects

Biography illustration



'birch sap'

empirical base:

3 interviews [2 with key informant [from Jan. and Nov. 2016], 1 with research partner]

desk research

Biography illustration

Path of project will be illustrated here

Some wider indications [results]...

What does this particular biography [and others] tell?

- innovation activities involve actors & expertise from different scales – stretching locally and globally;
- production of specific and multi-local spatialities [‘geographies’]; no spatial bounding;
- contingent character of innovation processes;
- events that provide opportunities for interaction play substantial role in driving innovation processes;
- distance and ‘thin’ local environments are not prohibiting obstacles, but require managing/mediating and resources;

Challenges for upcoming structured analysis:

- transforming and aggregating individual ‘stories’ [‘from micro to macro’]
- analysing relational aspects

... & some reflections

How 'economic' do economic actors behave? What are their motives?

Economic motives?

- increase sales and revenues, productivity, competitive situation, access new markets, gain more visibility;
- commodification of place and culture;

Beyond economic motives? Articulation of:

- place attachment, local embeddedness;
- 'entrepreneurial mission' to support communities (provision of jobs, income, social cohesion, etc.);
- → 'necessary statements' induced by interview situation?