

Institutional learning and the formation of science, technology and innovation policies in Galicia: a historical approach, 1981-2020

Aprendizaje institucional y formación de políticas científico-tecnológicas y de innovación en Galicia: un enfoque histórico, 1981-2020

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ANALYTICAL SUMMARY

Innovation and scientific capabilities are the foundations of long-term economic growth. Likewise, innovation process is characterised by its accumulateness and the wide array of agents and interactions involved, in which public sector plays a central role to foster innovation. In this regard, institutional learning is key in the success of the design and implementation of science, technology, as well as innovation policies. Given institutional learning depends on organisational capabilities, policy-making might be challenged in peripheral regions due to institutional thinness and lack of critical mass. Despite this fact, literature is traditionally mainly focused on the analysis of the components and interactions in innovation systems. In addition, the few studies that focus on policy formation do not show a long-term scope. For these reasons, it is key to shed light on the long-term channels of institutional learning in peripheral regions and its influence in policy formation regarding innovation.

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the historical evolution of the institutional learning related to innovation policy formation in the Spanish peripheral region of Galicia between 1981 and 2020. This paper is mainly focused on the influence of different levels of government in the regional government innovation agenda, as well as the interaction between regional government and other agents within innovation system. The methodological framework is based on the study of minutes and reports from different departments and commissions in charge of innovation policies. This information was collected from the Archive of Galicia, the Galician Innovation Agency (GAIN) and relevant literature in this field. Thus, this paper represents a step forward from existing studies, because it provides remarkable insights concerning long-term policy-making dynamics and the influence in this process of institutional learning channels. Moreover, the methodology is mainly based on primary information from the departments, commissions and roundtables in charge of innovation policies.

Empirical evidence underlines the general lack of coordination concerning innovation policies in Galicia during the whole period. Despite regional government deployed specific commissions and instruments to foster coordination, the different departments were reluctant to share information, which hinders potential synergies. Moreover, regional government is regarded as a reactive policy agent in innovation policy. At the beginning, it was the national government which decisively influenced the regional innovation guidelines during the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s. Likewise, regional policies were enriched with some regional successful experiences from the Basque Country and Catalonia. Throughout the 1980s regional policies were basically science policy, but during the 1990s and 2000s it also includes the technological and innovation approach. Not until the mid-2010s, regional government was a follower of the European innovation strategies. In this last period, the Galician government was able to successfully implement new innovation instruments, such as the case of public procurement in the health-care sector. Concerning the limitations of this study, the authors found difficult to gather some of the latest documents in the corresponding archives and agencies, because these documents were not available for public consultation.