

Chapter 3

Barrires and Incentives to Territory-Based Innovation Processes: From Technology to Interaction Among Actors

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ABSTRACT

The context of territory-based innovation processes includes both barriers and incentives. This chapter presents the research and findings of a study conducted with two sets of five community-led initiatives, one composed of small-sized initiatives and another composed of larger-sized initiatives, with a view to identify barriers and incentives to territory-based innovation. Following a mixed-coding approach, data was analysed to identify barriers and incentives to territory-based innovation prompted by the use of digital tools, by the interaction among actors, and by contextual factors. Results from both types initiatives show significant technology weariness, still initiatives praise the effectiveness of some digital tools, namely social media, in reaching their audience. Both types of initiatives evidence disappointment towards cultural traits and bureaucracy, being these factors experienced as a disheartening barrier. Yet, initiatives also commend the know-how and flexibility of specific actors, with whom initiatives interact with closely when performing their activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Centro region of Portugal covers an area of 28,199 km², is the second largest in Portugal and includes 100 municipalities. With a population of 2,327,755 inhabitants its distribution over the territory is not homogeneous, and sparsely populated territories inlands contrast with large population clusters, typically located in coastal lands (CCDRC, 2014). Rural areas are also characterized by a social demographic trend where there is a decrease of the younger population and an increase in the elderly population (Gomes, 2016). Other studies (Etuk, 2013; Reis, 2012) report on similar circumstances in which rural communities are increasingly depopulated and more socially isolated as young people move to urban areas looking for better training and employment opportunities.

Demographic dynamics recorded in the Centro region in recent decades show that two thirds of that territory struggles with depopulation. Distant and remote, these rural communities experience social disadvantages and decline in economic activities. While digital technologies could benefit these remote rural communities by linking people, businesses and services, rural isolation is amplified by the existent technological landscape, which holds problems not only in terms of broadband access but also in terms of equipment and the willingness or ability of residents to adopt them (Antunes, 2017; Ferreras, 2010; Silva, 2018; Tymoshchuk, 2019).

Addressing the regressive dynamics of these territories requires strategies that mobilize the endogenous potential of these territories, by prompting citizens initiative and entrepreneurship, and encouraging creativity and innovation of local communities (Etuk, 2013; Henriques, 2013; Ferreira, 2016). There are however both encouraging and limiting factors in this process of territory-based innovation. This chapter seeks to develop a better understanding of how community-led initiatives, groups of citizens who together act to better their territories, are operating to identify incentives and barriers to their processes. In particular, the study aims to identify negative (– barriers –) and positive (– incentives –) experiences triggered by the use of digital tools, the interaction among actors, and the overall context among community-led territorial innovation initiatives and their practices and activities.

In doing so, this research reports on the results and findings of two focus groups conducted with small- and larger-sized Community-led Territorial Innovation Initiatives (CTII) to uncover their types of experiences. After situating the work in the literature and presenting its background and context, this chapter presents the methodology followed to carry out the research. Afterwards the research and findings are presented and discussed. The chapter finishes by eliciting its conclusions that indicate technology weariness and bureaucracy as obstacles to the normal development of initiatives' activities and the effectiveness of specific digital tools and the know-how of some actors as stimulating factors.

BACKGROUND

Communities and Networks in the Process of Territory-Based Innovation

The growth of community-based initiatives is one of the key factors in the process of developing a territory, enabling it to develop more appropriate strategies and solutions to eliminate barriers to its growth. Involving community-based initiatives in territorial development can provide local communities with effective opportunities to participate in decision-making in their region's social, economic, cultural and political life (Malek & Costa, 2014; Zeng et al., 2019).

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