

Chapter 6

The Case for Smart Specialization Strategies (RIS3) as an Instrument for Place-Based Policies: Excavating the New Regional Development Paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Place-based policies are considered the new regional policy paradigm, replacing an existing concept of regional development pillars and redistributive logics. At EU policy-making level, the territorial dimension of the programming cycle for 2014-20 requires place-based policies to the formulation and implementation of a new set of instruments as the smart specialization strategies (RIS3). Based on dynamic competitive advantages anchored on territorial idiosyncrasies, RIS3 are as well an ex-ante condition of access to the structural funds at both a national and regional level. RIS3 are thus seen by us as a benchmark instrument for the place-based theory. An analysis of the scientific literature and official documents of the EU and its member states supported a correlation matrix that cross-referenced the characteristics of the RIS3 with those of the regional policy paradigms. Results reveal that RIS3 are hybrid policy instruments partly place-based but still with characteristics that bring them closer to the polarized and redistributive paradigm.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of the territorialisation of public development policies, in the context of the implementation of the new European Union (EU) programming cycle for the period 2014-2020, is based on the reference of place-based policies as the new paradigm of regional policies.

This chapter aims to assess whether Smart Specialisation Strategies, a new policy instrument at community policy-making level for the period 2014-2020, fit this new paradigm of regional policy.

The European Commission (2012) and the Northern Regional Coordination and Development Commission (2015) highlight that the national/regional research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) are integrated, locally-based economic transformation agendas, and stress the concurrence that they are a policy instrument based on the existence of a dynamic construction of competitive advantages anchored on the territorial idiosyncrasies and the possibilities offered by new competitive positions in each EU region.

Given their relevance and timeliness, place-based policies are considered as the “new regional paradigm”, since they are distinguished by their focus on improving the performance of regions, particularly by mobilising local and exogenous parties, replacing the previous paradigm of regional policies that were based on a logic of top-down sectoral implementation, due to administratively defined territorial circumscriptions. (OECD, 2011).

According to Barca, McCann and Rodriguez-Pose (2012, p.135), the dissemination of the theoretical basis of place-based policies was done through reports from international organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2009), the European Union (Barca, 2009) and the Corporacion Andina de Fomento (Fomento, 2010).

As Mourato (2013, p.166) also points out, at European policy-making level there has been a paradigm shift in which place-based policies are seen as central: “there is a major shift from a sector / region-based operative philosophy to a (multi) theme-based, multi-fund, place-based operative approach.”

Within this chapter, we will mobilise the territorial dimension of the EU Programming Cycle for the period 2014-2020 by analysing a new instrument, the RIS3, aiming to contribute to the scientific problematisation of formulation issues and implementation of these strategies in a context of territorialisation of public policies. We strive to answer the question whether RIS3 fit the new paradigm of regional policies: place-based policies.

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