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ENABLERS, EQUIPPERS, SHAPERS AND MOVERS: A TYPOLOGY OF INNOVATION
INTERMEDIARIES INTERVENTIONS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EMERGENT
INNOVATION SYSTEM

Abstract

Innovation intermediaries are seen throughout the innovation studies literature as key players in the development of emerging economic sectors and activities. In particular, intermediaries' knowledge brokerage function has been examined in detail, though many authors agree that the overall understanding of the functions of innovation intermediaries is fragmented and hard to operationalise (Abbate, Coppelino, Schiavone, 2013; Dalziel, 2010; Hannon, Skea, Rhodes, 2014; Howells, 2006; Van der Meulen et al., 2005).

Hence, a new approach to the study and operationalisation of innovation intermediaries mandates was proposed recently using the perspective of the "interventions" (Vidmar, 2018). A new analytical formulation was established within a geographically-bound sectoral system of innovation as the key unit of analysis, based on an extensive literature-driven systematic classification. However, therein remained a critical missing link between the intervention deployment and the wider systemic contexts, as well as a deeper understanding of the roles occupied by innovation intermediaries as organisations, which can only be resolved empirically.

This effort is also based on a practitioner's need identified in previous research within various industry sectors. Specifically, Venturini and Verbano (2014) mention several understudied aspects of technology transfer and innovation intermediation in the Space industry, advocating for an: "[...] Analysis of the intervention of brokers (including private) and other organizations devoted to facilitate the transfer such as incubators, venture capital companies, science and technology parks;" (Venturini Verbano, 2014:109).

Hence, this paper deploys this novel classification methodology within a case study of the (New) Space Sector in Scotland, a previously peripheral region now emerging as a global leader. Using mixed method primary data from surveys, interviews and social network analysis, and secondary document analysis, this study examines in particular: a) the make-up of the innovation intermediation organisations in Scottish Space Sector, b) their sectoral positioning through innovation networks and c) the interventions they deploy and effects they expect to have on the sectoral actors.

Based on this empirical analysis, a new typology is proposed linking the innovation intermediaries' interventions classification with their identified systemic roles of "enablers, equippers, shapers and movers". Furthermore, specific references are made to key innovation/science policy decisions behind the mandates for (any mix of) these roles. Overall, this paper aims to outline a comprehensively developed and empirically supported analytical and operational framework for high-tech innovation intermediation interventions, specifically beneficial to the (New) Space Sector.