

Territorial governance and business model dynamics of innovation intermediaries

- Evolution of pôles and filières in Normandy, France

Innovation intermediaries are public or private organizations that support innovation activities through structured knowledge exchange and coalition building among various stakeholders in a regional innovation ecosystem (Caloffi et al., 2023, Colovic et al., 2025, Rossi et al., 2022). They play pivotal roles in the territorial governance of the regional innovation ecosystem, whereby different parties or actors of various natures contribute to working out—sometimes through discussion, and sometimes through conflict—common projects for the future development of the territories (Niang et al., 2022, Torre, 2014, Torre and Traversac, 2011). In this process, innovation intermediaries act as brokers of new connection formation, facilitators of information and knowledge diffusion, mediators in partnership trust building, orchestrators of large-scale community socialization, and innovators launching new projects and ventures in the regional innovation ecosystem (Bourdin et al., 2020, Doloreux and Turkina, 2022, Wang and Bourdin, 2025). By coordinating innovation projects and organizing social events, innovation intermediaries stimulate technological and market knowledge diffusion while strengthening ties among stakeholders of the regional innovation ecosystem (Cohendet et al., 2010, Cohendet et al., 2021, Grandadam et al., 2013, Wang and Bourdin, 2025).

In this research, we assess how territorial governance antecedents affect the evolution of innovation intermediaries' business model through their multiple roles in the regional innovation ecosystem. Specifically, we explore how territorial governance antecedents - captured here through (1) geographical location and (2) organizational logic grounded in similarity and belonging - shape changes in innovation intermediaries' (1) value proposition,

(2) value architecture, and (3) value capture, as intermediaries that enact brokerage, facilitation, mediation, orchestration, and innovation roles.

For this purpose, we conduct a qualitative analysis of the determinants of the shifting business model change in two types of public innovation intermediaries (PIIs) in Normandy (France): nationally funded *pôles de compétitivés (pôles)* and regionally supported *filières d'excellence (filières)*. Normandy is an adjacent region between Paris and the English Channel with established industrial and innovation bases, but a comparatively moderate innovation performance¹ (European Commission, 2022), which makes the evolution and repositioning of intermediaries especially salient.

Empirically, we draw on 18 semi-structured interviews with the managers of innovation intermediaries and their members, as well as regional policymakers in Normandy. We conducted thematic coding and inductive grounded theory analysis (Corley and Gioia, 2004, Gioia et al., 2013, Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019) to examine the relationship between (1) territorial governance antecedents (geographical location and organizational logic), (2) role enactment (broker, facilitator, mediator, orchestrator, innovator), and (3) business model components (value proposition, value architecture, value capture). Then, we adopted grounded theory qualitative analysis (Corley and Gioia, 2004, Gioia et al., 2013, Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2019) based on semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders of *pôles* and *filières* in Normandy. The interview guide inquires about the motives of affiliation to the PIIs, the roles

¹ EU Regional Competitiveness: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/information-sources/maps/regional-competitiveness_en

and delivered values of PIIs in the regional innovation ecosystem, as well as the network building process under the intermediation of PIIs.

Based on interviews with key stakeholders of *pôles* and *filières* in Normandy, we aggregated four themes to bridge these subjects, including (1) Determination of geographical location; (2) Offset effect of organizational logic; (3) Presence and connection of influential stakeholders; (4) Diversification of financial sourcing (See Table 3). These themes show that proximities matter, but they matter through governance coalitions and role enactment: intermediaries adjust “what they offer,” “how they deliver,” and “how they sustain it financially” as territorial conditions and coalition composition evolve.

We claim the theoretical contribution of this research as follows:

First, this research provides a role-based, mechanism-oriented framework that explains the business model dynamics of innovation intermediaries from the perspective of their roles in territorial governance. We then show how these antecedents shape intermediaries’ business model components via changes in role salience and role combinations — brokerage, facilitation, mediation, orchestration, and innovation (Bourdin et al., 2020, Doloreux and Turkina, 2022, Wang and Bourdin, 2025) — across value proposition, value architecture and value capture (Delorme, 2023, Sala-Vilar et al., 2024, Teece, 2010). This moves the literature beyond a simple focus on proximity and business model change, and toward an emphasis on governance conditions, role enactment, and business model reconfiguration.

Second, we differentiate how geographical location and organizational logic operate on distinct business model components (Torre and Gilly, 2000). On the one hand, we still acknowledge the

fundamental contribution of spatial distance and administrative boundaries that determine the stakeholder segment and offering based on the positive spillover effect of collocation (Bathelt et al., 2004, Cohendet et al., 2021, Jaffe et al., 1993). On the other hand, organizational logics rooted in ex-ante similarity (shared cognitive awareness, knowledge base, organizational identity) (Balland et al., 2015, Parjanen and Hyypiä, 2018, van der Borgh et al., 2012, Villani et al., 2017), and belonging (socialization and institutionalization within value chains and policy arenas) become dominant when intermediaries orchestrate large-scale networks across territorial boundaries (Giuliani, 2007, Hafeez et al., 2025, Singh and Marx, 2013, Turkina and Van Assche, 2018).

Third, we identify influential stakeholders and funding diversification as two pivotal “stabilizers” of intermediaries’ business model dynamics under governance change. The physical presence and social connection with influential local stakeholders establish legitimacy, channel key resources and processes, and reorganize key processes of innovation intermediaries in value proposition and value architecture (Delorme, 2023, Landry et al., 2013, Rossi et al., 2022). Diversification of financial sourcing with influential stakeholders and administrative bodies outside regional boundaries enables innovation intermediaries to encounter financial uncertainty and sustain innovation leadership in value capture (Delorme, 2023, Doloreux and Turkina, 2022, Hassine and Mathieu, 2020, Sala-Vilar et al., 2024). This contribution is particularly relevant for PIIs whose financial sustainability depends on multi-level policy shifts: our results show how funding strategies are tightly entangled with network geography, coalition composition, and the intermediary’s ability to combine orchestration with brokerage and

facilitation.

From a policymaking perspective, we suggest that policymakers better understand the evolution of innovation intermediaries, especially the PII which are directly under financial and organizational support from local authorities. The close institutional connection with policymakers distinctively shapes how innovation intermediaries construct their business model, including the process of stakeholder identification and offering delivery in value proposition, the acquisition of key resources and capabilities as well as value chain construction in value architecture, and the diversification of financial sourcing in value capture. Policy design therefore benefits from explicit “governance-fit” thinking: support instruments should match the intermediary’s dominant role configuration and the territorial conditions under which value is produced. Reinforcing knowledge spillovers based on geographical proximity, policymakers can strengthen intermediaries’ roles in building dense local networks and leading innovation ventures among local stakeholders. Taking organizational logics into account, policymakers can also empower intermediaries to orchestrate cross-regional networks when critical mass and strategic resources are not locally concentrated. Finally, policymakers can help attract and legitimize influential stakeholders in the focal region, which supports intermediaries’ brokerage, facilitation, and mediation functions and sustains collective commitment to regional projects.

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