Innovation policy as performativity – the Case of Sweden.

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Abstract

This article analyses how the idea of 'innovationism' in Sweden has generated a new kind of idea-driven policy around the creation of innovative regional policy. In contrast to similar policies in this area, this policy does not manifest itself through traditional instruments, but evolves through symbolic and ritual performances; in particular through events and conferences. The article asks how this emerging idea has changed the existing institutional formation of sponsoring industrially relevant research. The vision of concerted action between decision-makers within modern innovationism reinforces territorial identity, but it also tends to devolve responsibility to the regional level since concerted action on the national level is hard to obtain. What emerges is a system of governing at a distance where different actors perform their roles according to often academic ideas of innovationism. The study is based on two qualitative studies in Sweden entailing both documentary sources and semi-structured interviews.

1. Introduction

> *Prior to the establishment of VINNOVA [the Swedish Agency for Innovation Systems], and before OECD started to employ the concept of innovation systems, practice preceded theory. Subsequently, theory came to precede practice. (Interview with retired policy analyst at VINNOVA)*

The interrelated concepts of 'innovation' and 'innovation systems' have since the early 1990s operated as the most prominent panacea to the current state of post-industrialised crises in a globalised competitive world. More and better innovations have, according to the OECD, become the default policy solution to many fiscal and industrial policy problems. From the

outside innovation policy is a cross-sectorial policy which bridges several policy domains (research, industry, education, finance, transport etc.), and which requires a whole-of-government approach capable of coordinating different layers of government and stakeholders (OECD, 2010). In particular the interplay and interdependence between public, private and third sectors are conceived as prerequisites for generating 'innovation' and subsequently further economic development in Europe (European Commission, 2011). While the definitions of innovation abound with several different meanings and alignments (e.g. social innovation, innovation in public sector etc.), innovation here refers to: 'new creations of economic and/or societal significance, mainly carried out by firms (public or private)' (Edquist, 2011:3). Also, we primarily refer to innovation in this article as to what used to be industrial and trade policy, but which has become an all-encompassing economic growth agenda (see below).

At present, the existing body of innovation policy research is on the whole dominated by best practice-perspectives in which the researchers are pursuing actual cases which hold the capacity of being replicated in other realms. Flanagan et al. (2011:705) calls this dominant approach 'prescriptive innovation policy studies'. Accordingly, innovation policy research accepts the world-view proclaimed by the policy makers, and departs from categories of practice rather than from categories of analysis (Brubaker, 2013). Equally, current national (and European) policies are clearly intertwined with the academic knowledge production as models, theories and concepts of the policy are progenies of theoretical academic output. Lagendijk, studying regional innovation policy, renders this kind of policy formation as a system of performativity where academics and policy-makers are 'thinking up and scripting stories of regional salience and shaping a reality in which these stories fit', that is, shaping reality by the very act of performativity (Lagendijk, 2001:18; Austin, 1962).

In this article we will analyse innovation policy in Sweden both in terms of the relationship between academia and the policy community, but also the actual implementation of the policy on a regional level. Sweden holds a long tradition of institutionalised, although not always formal, connections between research producers, corporate industrial interests and state bureaucracy (Fuglsang, 1993), manifested through specially assigned government agencies and strategic industrial research programmes. As such, this Swedish case can be seen as a 'developed' case of an otherwise globalised policy discourse. This article sets out to explore what happens when innovation as a form of 'speech act' emerges as a response to what is best described as post-industrialist challenges. The research question is: *how does the modern idea of innovation alter the existing system of state/industry/research-relations?* The empirical study is based on qualitative research in Sweden retrieved from elite interviews, archive studies and other forms of documentary sources.

The structure of the article is as follows. In the next section we will briefly review the extensive literature on (national/regional) innovation systems, the prescriptive policy suggestions, and some of the critical voices. Section three contains our analytical framework and our methods. Next, the sections four to seven contain our empirical analysis. Finally, we will in the concluding sections summarise and discuss our findings.

2. Innovation systems and 'innovationism'

In this section we will briefly describe the academic theories which underpin modern innovation policy, and explain the need of a more critical perspective on this academic policy-formation. By doing this, we introduce the concept of innovationism which comprises the ideational foundations for innovation policy.

Innovation policy is founded on the literature on 'National Innovation Systems' and a number of scholarly works. With the risk of ignoring or over/underplaying certain authorships (and

excluding related research fields), this body of literature entails a baseline understanding of what innovation systems comprise. First, innovative processes are fostered within spatially limited areas (nations, regions, districts) with the existence of institutionalised collaborative networks between academic research and universities; private industry and venture capital; and finally, government organisations (cf. Lundvall (ed.), 1992). These networks are the cornerstones of the 'system', and are sometimes referred to as 'triple helix models' (Etzkowitz, 2004) in which the output (research) of 'the entrepreneurial university' is transformed into industrial output (products and services) by (equally entrepreneurial) business actors. The spatial dimension is not only important for identifying the locus; it also emphasises that different geographical 'systems' are operating in an economically global and competitive world.

Second, innovation policy underpins a number of political objectives. Most notably economic ones (i.e. to promote economic growth and increase national/regional revenue), but also regional (supporting deprived and remote regions), health (new medical treatments), and environmental (e.g. more sustainable technical solutions). It is notable that although there may be some traditional ideological disputes entrenched in the policy (e.g. the role of the State), it is normally presented as a set of objective principles beyond the realms of party-politics and ideology (see below).

Third, policy instruments of innovation policy comprises a number of regulatory, economic or communicative instruments (Borrás and Edquist, 2013) ranging from traditional regulatory intellectual rights acts, through to various research funding mechanisms, to 'soft instruments' such as voluntary agreements and standards. While all these instruments in theory are available for governments, the tendency within Swedish innovation policy is to utilise more soft instruments, or to align the innovative policy aspirations with other government actions (such as e.g. public procurement). This is a result of the global convergence of regulation

regarding intellectual property, and in particular modern competition regulation prohibiting direct state subsidies to domestic industries. But there is also clear adherence among modern Swedish policy-makers to employ the least coercive instruments first and chose soft instruments. Not only does this reflect a general desire among policy-makers to avoid conflicts; it also reflects the current neo-liberal 'discourse' in which government intervention is frowned upon.

Finally, as these innovation systems are indiscernible their existence rests on our persuasion that they actually exist (Béland & Cox 2011). Consequently, the construction of common aims, and ultimately the fostering of a policy community, becomes an imperative aim for realising the policy aims. Actors, markets and symbols are constructed by the policy - the theory has to be 'performed'.

Despite the fact that it would be misleading to pronounce all academic literature concerning innovation systems as uncritical, the edge of critical remarks do not dispute the underlying premises of the innovation system literature. Instead the critical remarks are addressed to those decision-makers who fail to adhere to these premises in a coherent and comprehensive way (cf. Borrás and Edquist, 2013). Regardless of the rather compelling body of academic arguments against linear, rational and stagiest models of policy processes (cf. Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier, 1993; Deleon and Martell, 2006), the innovation system literature demonstrates a rather outdated confidence in linear, rational decision-processes in which decision-makers make their policy choices on the basis of rigorous policy analysis and firm evidence (cf. McCann & Ortega-Argilés 2013).

> *The policy process is seen as proceeding in discrete stages, implying a one to one mapping between scholarly ideas and policy rationales, and between policy rationales and policy instruments. Accounts of shifts in innovation policy are mapped onto changes in scholarly ideas, with the implication that the former are caused by the latter (Flanagan et al 2011: 704).*

A central problem with innovation system literature is the lack of a critical distance to the object of inquiry. Flanagan et al. (2011: 703) notes that according to the literature, instruments intended to achieve other policy goals in society (such as public procurement, regulation, educational policies, fiscal measures, etc.) can, and should, be 'co-opted' to achieve the goals of innovation policy'. Equally, Lagendijk & Varró (2013: 115) argue that regional policy, industrial policy and research policy are primarily seen as 'servants of innovation' and 'deliverables' for the EU Lisbon agenda.

Although there is variation between different 'systems', these lines of thoughts have obtained such a prominent position in modern policy-making that Valaskivi (2012) does not hesitate to label it 'innovationism' – a powerful ideology. 'Innovationism' is perceived as a form of religious conviction which brings celestial thinking into politics and economics. According to Valaskivi, innovationism shares several features with religion. First, innovationism entails a forward-looking vision of purpose, of damnation and salvation (nations innovate and become saved, or alternatively perish in the global competition). Second, it presents a faith in the 'innovation system'. The ecclesiastical activities within innovation policy, seminars, conferences, events are all confessions of faith. Third, although a truly global religion in scope, innovationism is linked to an exclusive congregation with individual clerics. Within the 'nation' there exists a selected small group of national experts ('gurus') who prescribe how the players should enact the policy if they wish to become more innovative. Fourth, the policy entails an ethical dimension in which a certain kind of individual behaviour (i.e. being innovative) is anticipated. Finally, innovationism resembles a religion in its proclamation of hope (in a harsh and globalised world).

Valaskivi's concept of innovationism will in the remainder of this article be used more as a policy idea (Campbell, 1998) rather than as a religion. Neither of the concepts within innovation policy can be seen as stable expressions of fixed interests and preferences held by

various actors. Rather, they are successful ideas which underpin the construction of such interests and preferences (Hay, 2011). In this ideational construction of interests, transnational actors such as the OECD and the EU play a pivotal role.

Innovationism is an idea that is built upon the interdependence between policy-making and expertise which, more strongly than the classical political ideologies, makes it a 'cause-effect belief' (Larsen & Andersen 2009) where specific policy prescriptions will produce specific results. The communication between the actors is here facilitated by shared beliefs and ideas, and innovationism may be interpreted as an idea with a strong ability to facilitate global communication (at least among elites), though, as Valaskivi (2012) states, national innovation systems somewhat paradoxically nails it down to national jurisdictions.

3. Methodology - innovation as a policy

In this section we develop how innovation policy could be understood as a set of ideas with seemingly important consequences for actual policy work through recurrent acts of performativity. We propose an almost evaluative approach – how is an existing and quite stable organisational formation, with established actors and interests, around innovation policy (the Swedish one) influenced by the modern idea of innovationism? The material for analysing this question is introduced in the last part of the section.

By and large, the methodology presented here has derived most of its premises from the current body of knowledge related to various studies of policy dynamics (Kingdon, 1984; Hall, 1993; Daigneault, 2014). The underlying ontological assertion is that cognitive and normative ideas jointly held by a group of interdependent actors within a policy domain have a strong impact on policy development. Moreover, this assertion is based on the supposition that policy outcomes is the result of a political process in which both problems and solutions are constructed, contested and concurred by a narrow set of pertinent actors within a policy

community. Consequently, the configuration of the policy domain becomes a central starting point for understanding the dynamics. While there usually is some inherent (functional) base for a policy domain, this base can be manifested in many ways, and actors within the organisation continuously redefine the *raison d'être* of the domain. That being said, they do not exist in an institutional void, but are provided structure through various forms of both formal and more ideational institutional arrangements.

In terms of the role of ideas in this policy, the 'ideational turn' is a relatively well-known phenomenon within policy analysis (Béland & Cox, 2011). This literature emphasises the importance of ideas in society as the basis for political intervention, including assumptions of reality, values, the objectives to pursue and the means to pursue them (Daigneault, 2014: 461), and the conflicts over ideas as a crucial factor behind institutional change (Peters et al., 2005). Focusing on dominant ideas also implies a focus upon 'the social and political processes in and through which interests are identified, constructed, and rendered […] actionable' (Hay, 2011: 81). This ideational construction of interests is at the focus of this article and is captured through the concept of 'performativity'. The reason for employing this concept is mainly empirical. Swedish innovation policy mainly entails communication, that is, speech acts and ceremonies in the shape of seminars, conferences, events, peer reviews, strategy groups etc. But the outcome of these efforts has an intrinsic reality-forming effect. Not only are they strategies and policies prepared for implementation, they are in fact an instrument in the implementation process since they reassert the shaping of the community.

Through descriptions of funding requirements, policy strategies, and events such as seminars and conferences, the systems of innovation materialise and become 'real'. One actual example is the new EU doctrine on 'smart specialisation' which advises regions to develop innovation strategies where the regions identify their competitive strengths and weaknesses, and to build innovation partnerships with societal stakeholders. Compliance to the 'smart

specialisation' is a funding requirement within the current EU cohesion policy (European Commission, 2012). Such diffusions are sometimes referred to as 'scripts' (cf. Lagendijk & Varró, 2013) where actors are 'programmed' or 'staged' to relate to other actors and behave in certain ways.

While innovationism is new, the functions and issues of innovation policy are barely new as policies and institutions for technological development and research have been around in Sweden for decades. From the 1950s and onwards industrially relevant research was funded by different public, or semi-public, agencies. This organisation of innovation policy has maintained stable to the point of verging on a path-dependent structure where innovation almost becomes synonymous with public funding of research and development activities within large industrial firms, research institutes and schools of technology. Of course, such a path-dependent structure is not only ideational but also interest-based since the recipients of these funds are interested in its maintenance. A central question of the remainder of this article thus becomes almost evaluative: is the performance of modern 'innovationism' able to significantly change this path dependent structure?

Methods and data

The four empirical sections are based on two distinct studies. The first study is presented in the next section where the historical background for research and industrial policy in Sweden with a special focus on actors and institutions is outlined. This is built on secondary sources regarding the development of innovation policy (Eklund 2007; Lavén 2008; Persson 2008) but also additional remarks regarding the same development made in the interviews of the second study. This second study is presented in sections 5-7, and is an analysis of the transition from national to regional innovation policy in Sweden. This study is based on qualitative in-depth interviews with three former senior policy analysts and project managers

from the Ministry of Enterprise, two retired analysts from and the deputy Chief Executive (CE) of the Agency for Innovation Systems, one project manager from the Royal Swedish Academy of the Engineering Sciences, and two project managers from Region Skåne. Moreover, this study utilises documentary sources such as web seminars and written material from national projects for developing a national strategy of innovation for Sweden and a regional project for developing an innovation strategy for Region Skåne. In section five we briefly describe the important relationship between (academic) theory and (policy) practice on the national and regional levels. In section six, we investigate the significance of the special instrument of events and 'gatherings' for innovationism in Sweden on the basis of the above-mentioned material. Finally, in section seven, we appraise the actual outcomes of the policy in one geographical region (Skåne).

4. Organising the national innovation policy in Sweden

Inspired by Schumpeter, the OECD developed as early as in the 1960s the idea in which close collaboration between universities and industries, and stimulated by the state, was conceived as a crucial factor behind national economic progress (Godin, 2009). This policy idea inspired the Swedish Social Democrat government, in close collaboration with The Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences, to establish a national agency for technological development in 1968 (The Board of Technological Development). This agency quickly became the chief government sponsor of industrially relevant research (Persson, 2008). In 1991 this agency became amalgamated with two other agencies into the new Agency for Industrial and Technological Development, but already ten years later this was once again split up, after which the Swedish Governmental Agency for Innovation Systems (in Sweden known as VINNOVA) was formed, closely resembling the original Board of Technological Development (Eklund, 2007). The first CE of VINNOVA explicitly claimed (when the

agency was started up in 2001) that the agency's 'ideological basis is what we currently calls innovation systems' (Eklund, 2007: 131).

In the course of time, funding industrially relevant research has remained the core function of the agency, endorsed by a narrow policy community. This community has comprised certain key analysts and managers within the different government agencies, representatives of large industrial groups, industrial research institutes and schools of technologies, basically, all the beneficiaries of research funding (Ibid).

While funding historically has been the predominant instrument, several actors have been advocating policy interventions such as: requirements in public procurement processes, government venture capital for emerging businesses, company incubators, tax (relief) reforms, public sector innovations, social innovation etc. (Braunerhjelm et al., 2012; Borrás & Edquist 2013). This broad policy paradigm of innovationism has been advanced through two government strategies (developed 2004 and 2012) and three strategic, national projects chaired by the non-governmental Royal Academy of Engineering Sciences, but including a multitude of actors such as governmental agencies and regional governments. However, these ambitious policy programmes have faced obstacles. First, as direct industrial subsidies have been outlawed for competition reasons, any direct financial support is strictly limited to research.

> *In terms of large investments government funding is limited to research. The reason for this is of course the competition laws. But it rests on a long-lasting tradition. Sponsoring research is easier to govern and control than for instance monitoring legal requirements for innovative public procurements […] which may not adhere to the current competition legislation. (Former senior analyst at the Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications and project manager for the second governmental strategy)*

Second, the fragmented structure of government needs to be taken into consideration. Our interviews exhibit strongly committed staff at the agency VINNOVA. Even if though its main

function is to sponsor research activities, the agency strives hard for expanding the remits of 'innovation' in line with its ideological character. However, the Swedish Cabinet Government is by default a bargaining organisation based on collective decision-making. So the budget demands from the agency is always balanced against the priorities of other ministerial demands.

> *This is the classical corporatist challenge. The Industry has been enticed into participation under the premises that this was going to become a co-decided and integrative process […] But the Treasury feel no obligation to herald the original commitments. The internal affairs of [Swedish] Cabinet Government are based on a logic of arbitration, and this logic takes precedence over all agreements with external partners. (Former senior analyst at the Ministry for Enterprise)*

Third, a more recent political obstacle for the policy domain has been the lack of involvement from the political national leadership.

> *We tried unsuccessfully to use the OECD as a battering ram for putting the issue on the national policy agenda. OECD was invited to evaluate the Swedish innovation policy as this became such a central theme for the OECD in the post-crisis period. The whole innovation policy domain is actually controlled by the Ministers of Finance since they represent the executive committee of the OECD. This was thought to lead to an increased interest from the Minister of Finance. But it didn't – the Minister declined to participate and sent junior ministers to the meetings in OECD. (Former analyst at VINNOVA and in charge of OECD issues)*

There is a wide-spread disappointment with the fragmented structure of Swedish government which is often lamented by lobbyists, in this case the Royal Swedish Academy of Engineering Sciences:

> *This proposal [that the PM should take the lead] always reappears, and they compare with Finland and their high-level [governmental] committees.*
>
> *Interviewer: Why don't they realise that Sweden is different, that we are not the US with a president who…*
>
> *I don't think they know anything about politics. I mean, the men in the industry are used to boss about with their organisations obeying. They can't see that politics is a different ballgame. And that misconception hasn't changed since I worked at the Academy 40 years ago. (Former analyst at VINNOVA)*

Consequently, the national policy-makers are unable to act in the concerted fashion envisioned by prescriptive innovation policy studies. One outcome of this perceived inertia on the national level has become to devolve the policy to subordinate levels through concrete programs. Shortly after the establishment of the agency VINNOVA, a comprehensive regional program (*Vinnväxt*, 'winning growth') was launched by the agency's CE with the ultimate objective of shaping 'triple helix' constellations on the regional level (interview with the deputy CE of VINNOVA). VINNOVA together with other agencies launched a similar program. A joint declaration from the agencies showed their quite pragmatic political, rather than academic, approach towards concepts such as cluster and innovation system:

> *The proposed program should support development of clusters and innovation systems in regions. These concepts have emerged in different scientific domains and have subsequently proliferated successfully within economic policies. For this program we do not find it fruitful to make any strict academic differentiation between the concepts, but seek to unite them when turning them into practical actions. (Proposal for a programme for innovation systems and clusters, VINNOVA/ISA/NUTEK 2002, quoted in (and translated by) Lavén 2008: 112).*

However, for potential beneficiaries, these concepts became of utmost importance since their ability to actively engage 'the right way' determined the success. Lavén (2008) conducted a case study on one project: the 'Microwave Road initiative', aiming at strengthening organisational collaboration within the microwave industry in the Gothenburg region. The founders of the Microwave Road initiative were researchers from an industrial research institute and managers from two large engineering companies, all interested in expanding the microwave industry. Their first funding application to the *Vinnväxt* program for funding was rejected, due to a weak 'triple helix leadership […] with regards to politics/society' (Ibid: 141). The management of the Microwave Road initiative rapidly understood that the theory embraced by the agencies demanded the involvement of political actors. Consequently, the Regional government of Västra Götaland was invited as to finance the project. Following this

they managed to attain seed capital from the joint agency program, and could begin to define themselves as a 'cluster'. Since then public funding has made up for about 90 per cent of the project's budget, and there has been a clear push to array representatives from all triple helix actors in the region. Lavén concludes that much of the actual activities concern organisational development rather than technological development, i.e. the establishment of a collaborative management structure and the inclusion of public sector actors in order to perform the collaborative script of a 'cluster' and receive funding (Ibid: 169-170).

Naturally, this fusion of regional and innovation policy should be conceived against the background of the parallel development in the EU strategies which merges innovative aspirations with the future of the regions. However, according to Lagendijk & Varró (2013), the roles of regional and innovation policy have become reversed in recent years:

> *In the past, innovation was seen as a tool for boosting regional development and, in particular, the catching up of laggard regions. Now, cohesion, as well as other policies (research policy, industrial policy), are seen as deliverables for the Lisbon Agenda and its follow-up, Europe 2020. In other words, they are the servants of innovation. (Lagendijk & Varró, 2013:115).*

In order to attain funding from the EU, regional authorities have to develop regional innovation systems. This development entails two interesting components. First, the organisational design of collaboration between public and private actors goes to the heart of innovationism, and has deeper material effects than simply producing ideas, meetings and strategies; it also scripts individuals and organisations with these ideas and strategies (Ibid). Public and private organisations are moulded in line with collaborative ideas (triple helix, clusters, and innovation systems) as required by the funding mechanisms, and often built upon de-contextualised scripts such as the success stories of Silicon Valley.

Second, the government decide how innovations should be developed regionally. Swedish innovation policy does not represent a transition from government to governance. Instead, we are witnessing a restored form of government which prescribes organisational design known from the governance model such as networks, partnerships, joint responsibility and co-funding, but still with a clear hierarchy. Thus, innovationism channelled through EU, as well as the national governments, is about governing collaboration at a distance.

5. Intertwined policy/theory

The 'theory' is, as mentioned above, expected to materialise in appropriate policies (Laranja et al., 2008). When, for example, actors from the regional government of Skåne present their policy work to an international audience they adhere to the established and internationalised scripts of innovationism. The relationship between the innovation policy fields and the academic community in Sweden is strong as most of the academic expertise commissioned to monitor the development is sponsored by innovation promoting agencies, especially VINNOVA. In addition, there exists a number of governmentally sponsored innovation research centres in Sweden. In the Region of Skåne it is CIRCLE (Centre for Innovation, Research and Competence in the Learning Economy). The founder and head of CIRCLE, Prof Charles Edquist, is not just one of the most internationally acclaimed academic experts on innovation systems, he is also a passionate policy advocate within the policy domain (cf. Eklund, 2007), and the centre has also been deeply engaged in the development of the regional government innovation strategy in Skåne.

However, in practice it is not that simple to convert theoretical concepts into policy, even though it does help that 'policy-makers' and 'experts' are closely interconnected (as argued by e.g. Majone, 1989). That the academic research centres in the field are sponsored by the responsible agency is certainly important. The aspirations of VINNOVA to fund virtually all

existing Swedish research about innovation systems shows the intertwined nature of policy practice and theory. More important it also indicates that the academics are 'guided' to produce the *correct* type of knowledge. It is hard to imagine that the funding bureaucracy whose very *raison d'être* is the commitment to innovationism would sponsor research criticising the underpinning premises of the very same. The academic development of theory, models and concepts is led by policy, rather than the other way around (Lovering, 1999). So when the regional government of Skåne pays tributes to the central scripts of innovationism and receives legitimacy in the OECD review (OECD, 2012, see below), it is not because the Skåne innovation system is a product of the academic prescriptions, but because Skåne adapts to the policy prescriptions of a few selected academic sources.

6. The soft instruments and the performative character of events and strategies

Swedish innovation policy revolves around different kinds of events for stakeholders. The two government policy strategies for innovation policy are both the outcome of such 'dialogue' activities:

> *We ran some high-level seminars with the aspiration of producing an innovation policy strategy. We invited the cream of the industry and others, and allowed them to share their views and needs regarding the innovation policy (Project manager at the Ministry of Enterprise for 'Innovative Sweden', 2004).*
>
> *Although the innovation strategy only indicates the direction, it is based on an extremely comprehensive dialogue including a series of meetings with 1,200 participants from various sectors in collaboration with the regions. (Project manager at the Ministry of Enterprise for the 'National innovation strategy', 2012)*

Whereas the above mentioned and well-organised gatherings were supposed to feed into the policy processes of the strategies, the actual outputs (i.e. the strategy documents) are pretty thin and diluted. Innovationism is not about the actual outputs, but about the process. This process is mainly a chain of meetings as a form of performative, rather than purposeful,

collaborative and collective action. Not only are these collective dialogue processes the flesh and blood of innovation systems; they are conceived as the actual ends.

> *We sought to work with new types of meeting facilitation methods. We challenged our colleagues by asking them not only to put themselves in a negotiation position [at the dialogue meetings] with an analytical attitude to the concept of innovation and the policy domain, but to develop their views on personal experiences. I'm personally inspired by Peter Senge's learning organisations and the ideas about peer reviews, and that successful change processes must encompass both societal meta-levels as well as the personal. (Project Manager at the Ministry of Enterprise, for the 'National innovation strategy', 2012).*

Innovationism only represents a faction of the modern event industry where prominent actors devote a large amount of their working time to meet up with other prominent actors at events. The aspiration of these events is not to identify solutions and inputs to government policy, but to transform the mind-sets of the stakeholders, and to reaffirm and maintain the policy domain's position on the political agenda. Innovationism as part of the event industry seems to produce outcomes which are more expressional than instrumental. They (re)articulate problems, forge opinions, constitute new groups; in fact they are innovation systems in their own rights.

In addition to the Swedish government, the dominant actor within Swedish innovation policy domain is the Royal Academy of Engineering Sciences. This lobbyist organisation has since the beginning of the 2000s been running campaigns to get the government to adapt a more comprehensive policy. These campaigns usually call for more projects and events. The list of participants, and in particularly the status of them, is crucial for the outcome.

> *These projects summit people from the whole range of the political life of Sweden, organised interests, industry and academics. You bring both your personality and your competence to the table. And these meetings transcend ideological differences…. (Project manager for the innovation strategies of the Royal Academy of Engineering Sciences)*

The fact that these events often are broadcasted online to a broader public implies that they are staged in some sort of semi-public realm.

The mechanisms where meetings enact global scripts of regional innovation can also be witnessed in the action plan for the Regional government of Skåne.

> *The first stage of the process was to consolidate the imperative status of the innovation system in dialogue with other actors in the region, and on national level. The regional government is taking a lead position in the process. We have run a number of meetings, and one major conference, where the regional government clearly have been conferred the independent role of coordinating, making priorities and developing the policy (Regional government of Skåne, Action Plan, 2009:6)*

These types of claims and assertions substantiate not only the existence and legitimacy of these (basically constructed) economic regions, but also bestow acceptance and legitimacy from other actors such as the EU and OECD.

> *The policy work has been inspired by conceptual developments in regional innovation policy, conducted in academic and European policy circles, to which Skåne's decision makers are well connected. Extensive analyses by academics and consultants, as well as regional dialogues involving a large set of regional actors, and two international peer review exercises, were undertaken with the view of developing a regional innovation strategy for Skåne. (OECD 2012: 112)*

7. Innovative regions – the policy in action

> *Innovation policy can't be compared to traditional policy domains. We are here talking about the objective to create coordination, dialogue, mutual views and co-action between different domains. (Interview with project manager at the Ministry of Enterprise for the 'National innovation strategy', 2012)*

The most salient feature with the peer review exercises and the strategies for Region Skåne is the strife for consensus, not just among the political decision-makers, but among all relevant stakeholders in the Skåne region. The external consultant Arne Eriksson who chaired one of the peer-review exercises, and who also has advised the Skåne region how to develop policies, has invented (actually paraphrased from Norwegian) a concept for this – *samhandling* meaning 'joint action', or more literally, 'co-action'. Co-action seems at first to be more or less synonymous with collaboration, but is conceived to indicate something additional. Despite a multitude of decision-makers, decisions should be taken in consensus.

Eriksson has elaborated on the concept in a VINNOVA-publication '*Samhandling för innovationsledd tillväxt*' [Co-action for managing innovative growth]. He never defines co-action precisely, but indicate that its closest synonym is 'collective action':

> *To describe clusters and innovation systems as system connotes that concepts such as interaction, interdependence, coordination and integration take a centre position. These are also the word I connect to governance in this study. If no single actor has got the resources to solve a problem, but require assistance from other independent agents, collective action is needed. I employ the concept of co-action to describe this condition. (Eriksson 2005: 29)*

Eriksson formulates a central feature of innovationism which also relates to the essential role of events. In a rather unorthodox fashion, Eriksson takes his inspiration from the work of James G. March and Johan P. Olsen, *Democratic Governance* (1995). Eriksson's argument is that Swedish policy-making traditionally has gravitated to an instrumental model of policy-making (which is the one March and Olsen criticises in their work). The preferred perspective in the book, the institutional one, with a logic of appropriateness as the ground for action, emphasises collective identity, values, adaptation and institutions formed around integrative ideas. Co-action, according to Eriksson, ought to be founded upon these norms rather than bargaining between self-interested actors. The alternative is a system of mutual distrust where only control mechanisms can maintain the system. This kind of linear model of government…:

> *..does not align with development activities in a network economy, and consequently not in clusters and innovation systems. […]. In the inclusive model there is a baseline assumption that priorities cannot be implemented in a logic order, but becomes a function of the engagement in the development phase. Consequently, we are not talking about linear and sequential processes, but about dynamic ones with constant feed-back loops and chains of dependencies between what needs to be done by whom, and how. This is the main reason why joining forces around the vision and the strategic idea is imperative. The strategic idea does not only outline the roadmap, it also functions as the basic co-action instrument (Ibid: 111)*

Co-action thus goes beyond 'simple' collaboration. It is the 'activist' and 'mobilising' process, rather than a rationally planned policy process Eriksson has in mind. Notice the performative character of innovationism as a social activity, which constructs collective identities and forms joint visions as foundations for a consensus on future actions. With the preceding section on meetings in mind, co-action may be seen as the integration of different interests in a unitary realm where the objectives are subordinated to the very process itself. Eriksson's concept of co-action is widely used in strategic development plans in Swedish regions, for instance in Skåne:

> *A specification of common targets and actions will be consolidated in a co-action plan. /…/ No individual actor owns the issue, the problem, or the deal. No-one has got the capacity to retrieve all knowledge alone. The power of innovation is created when different actors through networks, or more fixed constellations, collaborate and make collective decisions. This is the way to create system-innovations and further efficiency (International innovation strategy for Skåne 2012-2020: 9).*

It is easy to see the attraction of the co-action concept, since the regions have been granted more responsibilities for economic development either by the EU, or by the national governments. However, the tradition of *local* self-government is strong in Sweden, and the regional governments are not always considered to be the legitimate actors for developing the region. The necessary support for 'collective action' may thus be lacking; something emphasised by Skåne's invited international peer-review team.

> *The business and knowledge diversity across the Skåne region is quite significant, with the dominance of high-tech knowledge providers and industry located in the urban Lund-Malmö area. While these stakeholders are the primary sources for innovation, it is paramount that their dominance is translated into leadership and mentorship. Assuming such roles, they can drive the development of innovation equally across all areas of the Skåne region, thereby strengthening and empowering other players in the wider Skåne region team. (Regional Government of Skåne and VINNOVA, 2009:14)*

To develop such leadership, the peer-review team highly recommends the formation of an innovation council comprising strong representation from the business community. The

council should develop the strategy for the region, maintain the dialogue, devise collaborative action, link stakeholders and communicate the region's narrative: 'In particular the Innovation Council can demonstrate how all the actors in the innovation system are committed to delivery against the strategy' (p. 9). Also, the new strategy should be inclusive and reach out to all parts of the region:

> *To improve general well-being and wealth across the whole of the Skåne region no privileged or hallowed ground exists for any single group or stakeholder, but a common and regional team effort towards a common vision, mission and strategy will be paramount. (p. 14)*

In all these documents politics is absent despite the fact that Region Skåne (as well as the local governments in Skåne) is a political organisation with a politically elected leadership. However, according to our sources (Eriksson, the peer-review team as well as the strategic documents from Region Skåne) politics, and in particularly adversarial politics, has dissolved in light of the commitment to joint visions and ideas.

With such a systemic view, one may ask what the defining feature of the innovation system actually is. The collective identity formation around the innovation system is clearly linked to territorial identity, a form of geopolitical positioning which rules out the possibility of interest-based conflicts within the region. The importance of forming a consensual community in Skåne is because such a community may be seen as a precondition for governing the economy; a form of economic governance revolving around collaboration rather than competition. A crucial resemblance between the Skåne innovation system and ideas such as nationalism and regionalism is not just the call for unity, but the importance of reinforcing them territorially. This may seem like a paradox, given the global scope of both innovationism and perceptions of global economic interdependence. However, innovationism is abstract and must be related to something concrete in order to be politically applied. The

outside is a world of fierce global competition. Inside, the regional actors co-act in harmony with each other. The region mobilises to survive in this harsh world.

8. Discussion: innovationism as politicisation

Our empirical findings show that innovationism at least demonstrates that the old consensual and corporatist model of Swedish economy is not lost in our memories. Even though we have no evidence for making any claims about other states, we suspect that similar patterns with government intervention and corporatist arrangements can be detected elsewhere in Europe – industrial policy 2.0.

This section will expand the results from the study and make some suggestions for theory-building. As a form of politics, innovationism has the following characters which have not been sufficiently explained in earlier research:

First, the previous science and technology policy, as well as innovationism is actually a case of government intervention in the market economy. But in contrast to the 20th century governments, the intervention this time aims at masterminding the market from a distance without any ideological signifiers. Distance becomes essential since the concerted action demanded by innovationism cannot be mustered on the national level. The same traits are visible in the general EU innovation policy: the policy is legitimated as an intervention grounded in allegedly neutral, academic knowledge, which aims to form the behaviour of actors at a distance. Second, innovationism restores the territory as an important factor in economic development. In opposition to an increasingly globalised economy, innovationism strive to bring back (some) control over economic growth to the politically elected 'constituency'. This is also congruent with a politically constructed multi-level governance system in Europe. Finally, innovationism furthers a consensual and unitary sense of politics carried out through collaboration. We would argue that this depends upon the EU multi-level

governance system, as well as the idea of innovationism per se, where conflict sensitivity derives from the fact that important actors must not be alienated – thus the efforts to ground the policy in "neutral" knowledge. However, using the term 'sense' implicates that this kind of politics mainly is performative, rather than instrumental, and does struggle to materialise.

Innovationism enables elite consensus on the national and regional levels concerning prescriptions in a world where national and regional elites' influence is declining. Equally, the promise of innovationism becomes a window for political elites (i.e. politicians and bureaucrats) to contribute to the economic development. This is actually the most interesting feature of Swedish innovationism, the vision of a harmonious and consensual, politically governed economic development based on collaboration, not competition. Co-action is a metaphor for how political and business leaders collaborate for supporting a territorially defined economic entity. This collaborative development is not only a vision and a normative objective, but also institutionalised through the funding mechanisms. Private businesses and other actors with an interest in state financial support need to engage in concerted action with the public sector. In effect, governmental control over the economy is extended. Such politicising consequences of modern 'governance structures' have also been observed in the UK (Kelly, 2007; Fenwick, et al., 2012).

In contrast to the development of new high technological inventions, innovation systems require abstract imagination and the collective performance of belief. Due to this abstract character, the innovation system is nailed down spatially, and it seems like territories serve the role as boundary objects for collaborative action. The concept of boundary objects was originally coined to understand how scientists construct collective meaning through the invention of institutions such as museums (Star & Griesemer, 1989), but its use has extended to studies regarding, for instance, how technological artefacts facilitate shared meanings, or how the 'object' of 'pupils' and 'patients' facilitate collaborative action between different

professional groups. In the case of Region Skåne it is obvious that the 'regional innovation system' as a territorial entity is constructed as a recipient which not only facilitates communication between different circles of actors (and potentially reconciles regional-local conflicts), but presents us with a new meaning of a geographical territory.

As discussed in the introduction, there is a strong resemblance between innovationism and the construction of other collective identities. Innovation policy is akin to Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of nations as imagined political communities (Anderson, 1991). Like nationalism, 'innovationism' is a belief system which conveys territorialised meaning to society. Innovation policy is a collective identity project, but mainly an identity project addressed to elites such as private consultants, academics, politicians, bureaucrats and actors from the corporate world. The most interesting quality of innovation policy is its vision of economic development founded on collaboration implying a partly harmonious co-operation between economy, politics and civil society, at least on a specific territorial level.

9. Concluding remarks

Innovationism is based on a paradox. It contains a globally diffused idea about a world-wide division of labour, but its consequences are that territorially based identities are promoted more, rather than less. 'Co-action' in a collaborative economy is envisioned in a specific territory, while the outside world is characterised by fierce competition. As a first answer to our research question, the vision of concerted action between decision-makers within modern innovationism reinforces territorial identity, but also tends to devolve responsibility to the regional level.

Collaborative policy-making, often aligned with governance networks, is most often interpreted in instrumental terms, as intentional aspirations to reach some aims. This article shows that collaborative politics may also be performative in nature, that collaboration

processes are ends *per se* with the possible consequence of sense-making across political boundaries and constituencies, as well as between political, academic and economic actors. All in all, an implementation process far from the academic literature on innovation systems. These events seem to express the identity of a coalition of development as well as the mutual recognition of its 'co-acting' members. Encounters between stakeholders within innovation policy are thus existing illustrations of innovationism seen as development coalitions. Through these performative actions we witness how the system and the policy is constructed. As a second answer to our research question, modern innovationism changes existing conventions on policy-making through its activist ideology.

But this performative politics may also be purposive in the way that it signals to other levels – OECD, EU, government – that there is a territorially defined innovation system awaiting acknowledgement from the outside world. The political logic of innovationism requests that political actors represent Skåne rather than adversarial parties and ideologies. The innovation systems are liberated from ideological conflicts, and all actors adhere to higher public values. As a third answer to our research question, ideas are adapted to existing policies – the system is still interest-based, albeit on a higher level.

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