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Flanders as a creative innovative region

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Flanders: strengths and weaknesses

Sleuwaegen and Boiardi used this framework to compare how the innovation performance of Flanders fares against other European regions.

Their results indicated that Flanders sits comfortably within the second highest group of Europe's innovative regions and is ahead of the average high-performer on intelligence and infrastructure.

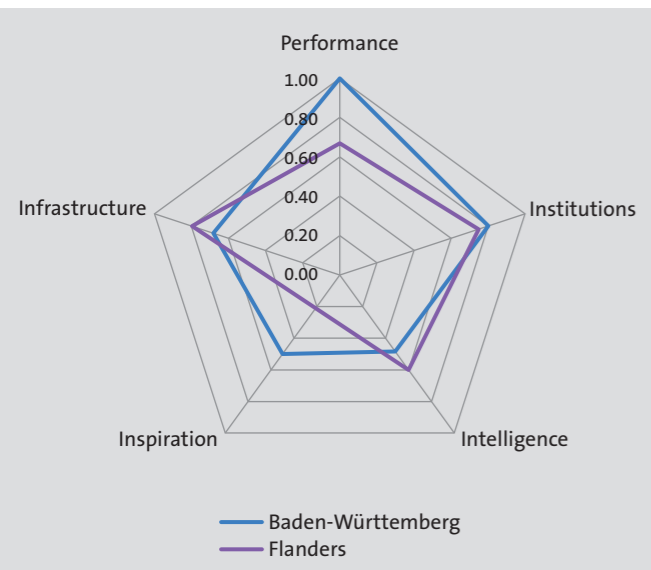


Figure 2: Performance of the top performer and Flanders

However, its institutions are less effective and its creative class significantly smaller than its peers, and these factors explain its weaker performance overall in comparison to Europe's most innovative regions.

When compared with the star performer, Baden-Württemberg, Flanders' weaker institutions and smaller creative class become much more apparent.

The authors say their results indicate that Flanders needs to improve how institutions and inspiration contribute to innovation, and suggest that the Flemish government and local authorities would do well to address these weaker pillars when designing policies.

They recommend specific measures that include reducing human capital taxation; strengthening the protection of intellectual property rights; and boosting the creation of high-tech jobs.

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the impact of the 4i pillars on innovation, the authors analyse how the three creative processes work through a case study of the Leuven region.

Implications: policy matters

Sleuwaegen and Boiardi's framework for measuring creative processes by examining the conditions that sustain them provides valuable insights for regional policymakers:

- > Policy should be based on a good understanding of the ways in which institutions, intelligence, inspiration and infrastructure influence creativity and how these interact;
- > Education is a necessary – but not a sufficient – condition for a region's innovation system to excel;
- > Inspiration plays a significant role in innovation performance, confirming the growing emphasis that policymakers are putting on the development of creative sectors that can act as catalysts for change in mature industrial zones;
- > Regional industrial policies should make full use of EU programmes and infrastructure;
- > Education, training and lifelong learning offer other ways to leverage a region's intellectual and inspirational assets. School, vocational and higher education curricula should focus on skills that link creativity with entrepreneurship, innovation and internationalisation;
- > A region's policies should endeavour to exploit synergies with other regions by building networks based on the generation and use of knowledge.

Reference:

Flanders as a Creative Innovative Region by Leo Sleuwaegen and Priscilla Boiardi, (Flanders DC Knowledge Centre at Vlerick Business School). June, 2011.



Creativity counts

Policymakers can drive growth by fortifying the creative pillars that sustain innovation, entrepreneurship and internationalisation.

Europe's industrial regions face pressing demographic and environmental challenges while confronting ever tougher competition from rapidly growing emerging economies. A region may have abundant resources but that is no guarantee of long-term growth, with studies suggesting that success is determined by how capital and natural endowments are put to use.

“Fostering perfect conditions for creativity can unlock a region’s potential”

Research by Flanders DC Knowledge Centre at Vlerick Business School has indicated that the magic ingredient giving some regions a competitive edge is creativity. Professor Leo Sleuwaegen and Priscilla Boiardi identified the crucial role played by three creative processes – innovation, entrepreneurship, and internationalisation.

They developed a framework for measuring a region’s creativity that provides a way of explaining why some regions are better at fostering the perfect conditions for ingenuity.

Applying their method to Flanders, Sleuwaegen and Boiardi provide key insights to help policymakers translate regional entrepreneurial creativity into global market opportunities.

Innovation: key to growth

Globalisation means many regions can no longer compete in traditional sectors solely on the basis of cutting costs or efficiency – putting creativity at the heart of new business models.

While regional assets are necessary for growth, to be successful regions need to foster creativity that combines innovation, entrepreneurship and internationalisation.

Innovation, in particular, is a key driver of growth – boosting productivity while improving well-being and environmental sustainability – yet it varies considerably among regions.

So far, theories seeking to understand innovation have downplayed the socio-economic and institutional context in which it occurs or have used different units of analysis and concepts to explore it.

Other approaches emphasising how innovation fits into a system of interactions between different actors or highlighting the importance of contexts and networks indicate that:

- > Innovation has to be regionally driven and policymakers need to focus on the local factors that stimulate growth and entrepreneurship;
- > Networks help companies to benefit from knowledge spillovers and hence to become more innovative;
- > As innovation depends on context, social, cultural and informational factors are of critical importance.

The 4i factors: pillars sustaining creativity

This study builds on these theoretical approaches to innovation in order to fashion a conceptual model of regional development based on the fundamental conditions needed to sustain creative processes.

It is argued that four basic pillars – Institutions, Intelligence, Inspiration and Infrastructure – determine the degree to which a region fosters innovation, entrepreneurship and internationalisation.

These so-called “4i” factors are shaped by policy and other local variables to determine a region’s innovative performance:

- > **Institutions:** These have a profound impact on creativity by influencing all economic, political and social interactions and establishing the “rules of the game” in a society. Research suggests that institutional quality is closely linked to levels of innovation.

- > **Intelligence:** The scope and quality of education plays a key role in generating innovative skills. A region’s capacity to translate knowledge into innovation and growth is shaped by levels of tertiary or higher education and involvement in life-long learning.
- > **Inspiration:** A “creative class” is increasingly driving growth, and cities or regions that emphasise talent, tolerance and technology can be magnets of innovation. Creative people are attracted to like-minded individuals and, to lure them, regions must nurture a climate of openness and establish immigrant-rich, creative urban areas.
- > **Infrastructure:** Technological infrastructure – research labs, universities and industries connected via fast and reliable communication networks – is crucial for innovation. It requires public R&D spending, well-developed ICT and broadband systems, and the use of software to encourage networking outside the box.

Sleuwaegen and Boiardi set out to measure the direction and intensity of the main creative processes by assigning quantitative indicators to each of these four pillars.

They assessed institutions by using data from surveys of business leaders and EU residents; intelligence by the proportion of the working population with higher education and in life-long learning; inspiration by using data on employment in cultural and high-tech sectors; and technological infrastructure by levels of public R&D spending and broadband access.

The researchers then sought to determine whether strong 4i factors lead to greater innovation by analysing this data against a region’s innovative performance as measured by patents.

They identified four groups of innovative region according to the distribution of patents: low performers, medium-low performers, medium-high performers and high performers.

When data for the creativity pillars and innovation were plotted against each other for these groups, the results confirmed a close relationship between the 4i pillars and levels of innovation.

Further analysis of 87 European regions found that institutions, inspiration and infrastructure make a particularly significant contribution to a region’s innovation performance.

Moreover, the results indicated that sectors making up “cultural employment” in the arts, entertainment and recreation make a key contribution to innovation by providing creative people with inspiration.

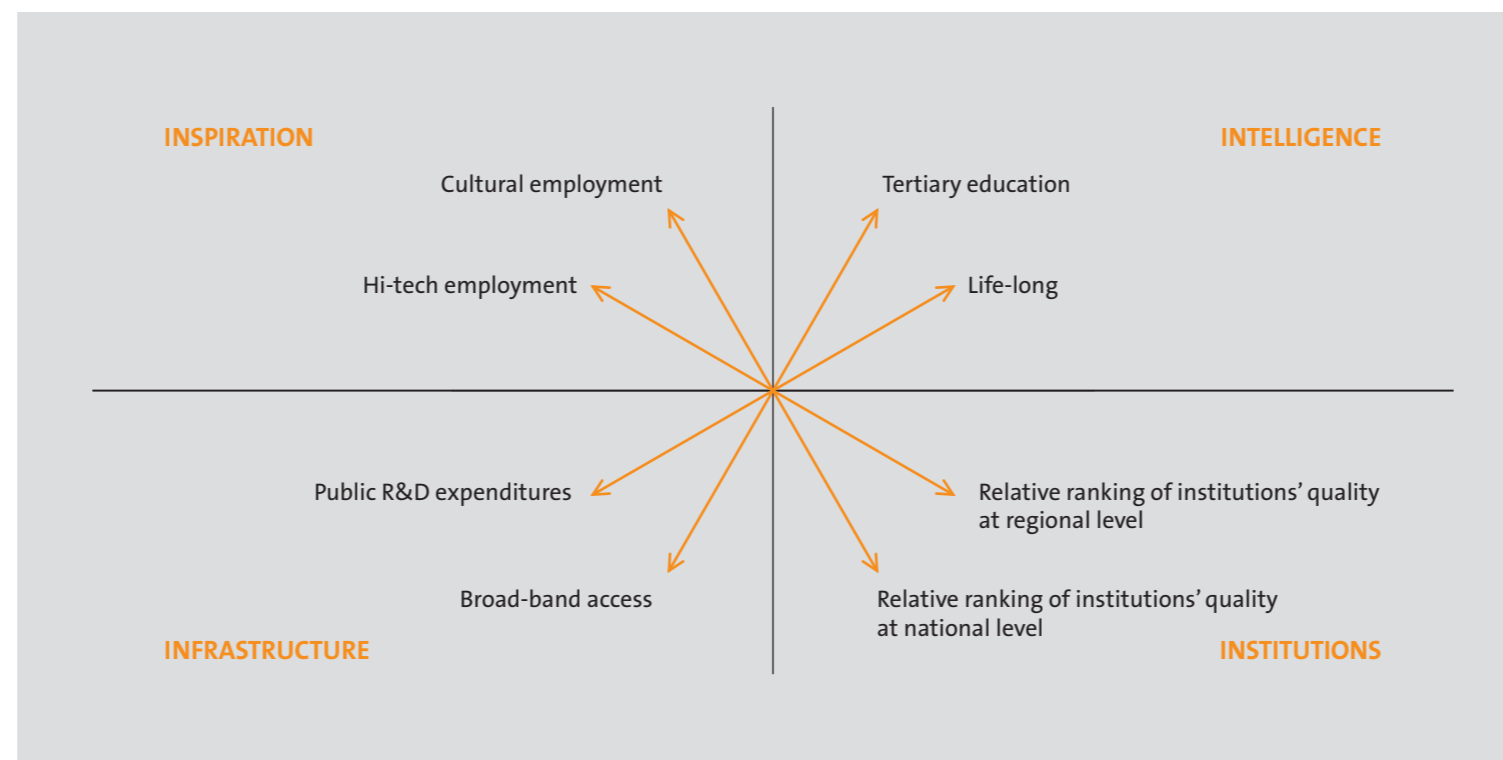


Figure 1: Pillars: essential elements