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Stimulating policy complementarities in the Regional Development Process

What it takes to generate sequential solutions to policy challenges and bottlenecks hampering regional development? This research paper explores the possibility to generating temporary or long-lasting synergies between policy sectors that affect regional development. The idea of promoting such synergies between policy sectors should not be confused with a strategic approach in which all actions are carefully designed a priori and implemented at once. Evidence illustrates the limits of a “blue print” approach to regional development. Wide policy processes have often failed due to the lack of important policy “pieces”, the non-cooperation of key policy sectors, or the reluctance of key stakeholders.

Conversely, by recognizing the need to negotiate each step while deploying an incremental policy that evolves according to the exogenous and endogenous conditions it meets, this approach may have the advantage of promoting the structural changes needed to trigger development. In other words, the objective is regional development, but the path to it is the product of a self-discovery process in which many stakeholders cooperate, in a single iteration or in more iterations. Importantly, all negotiations should aim to obtain a first best-policy solution to a given challenge, including those that are considered marginal or not relevant. The policy system should always perform at its best and people involved in the negotiation process (policy makers and “stakeholders”) should always care and work to obtain the best possible outcome.

The paper introduces the issue of policy complementarities and tailors it to regional development policy. It presents a complementarity matrix – a heuristic device – that can help policy makers and stakeholders in their policy negotiations. It reasons on the advantages related to adopting an approach that does not scare off reluctant actors (those that have lost faith in the possibility to trigger development) and that may generate its own “implements” (important enabling conditions such as social capital) when deployed. Finally the paper presents some limits of the approach and discusses the problem of generating a common will towards socio-economic development