In search of indicators to support the ‘perfect cluster’
Where evaluation theory collides with policy practice
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Introduction

The concept of geographically concentrated ‘clusters’ of firms, research institutions and other organisations has been popular in economic development policy circles since the 1990s, following the publication of Michael Porter’s (1990) Competitive Advantage of Nations. Today there is widespread acceptance of the need to design policies that nurture and support cooperative relationships among groups of firms and other agents to boost competitiveness and innovation. Despite the widespread use of cluster policies as cornerstones of regional and national competitiveness policy, few systematic efforts have been made to develop methodological difficulties in evaluating cluster policies, and capturing both direct and indirect impacts. For example, standard evaluation approaches focused on the firm as a single point of measure risk missing the added value of collaboration core to the cluster approach. Methodological difficulties in evaluating cluster policies, and capturing both direct and indirect impacts. For example, standard evaluation approaches focused on the firm as a single point of measure risk missing the added value of collaboration core to the cluster approach.

Addressing these challenges necessitates the coming together of academic expertise and analysis with the real-time and evolving experience of policy makers and practitioners. This paper makes a contribution in addressing this shared challenge and moving the cluster evaluation state-of-art forwards.

Conclusion

- To bridge gaps, subject expertise and open new possibilities for realistic implementation of cluster policies.
- To support different audiences by providing ‘usable’ information about the impacts of cluster policies.
- To facilitate future collaborative efforts by sharing evidence and experiences.

Results

The process has resulted in the development and validation of an evaluation framework based on what is commonly referred to as the ‘perfect cluster’ which is accompanied by a series of cluster evaluation principles.

Principles to Guide Evaluation

- Evaluation needs to reflect the actual context.
- Credibility is challenged by the need for more empirical evidence.
- Different audiences need different outputs.
- Social capital and trust are both central to the aims of evaluation.

The different locations where the survey will be tested:

Selected References


