

# Emergence and embedding of innovation brokers at different innovation system levels

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# Seeing tentative governance as bridging gaps

- Cognitive gaps (learning)
- Cultural/institutional gaps (collaboration)
- Information gaps (information asymmetry)
- 'system gap' (entrants vs. incumbents)



# Intermediaries to bridge gaps: Innovation

## intermediary

- Howells (2006): “an organisation or body that acts as an agent or broker in any aspect of the innovation process between two or more parties [...] helping to provide information about potential collaborators; brokering a transaction between two or more parties; acting as a mediator, or go-between, bodies or organisations that are already collaborating; and helping find advice, funding and support for the innovation outcomes of such collaborations”



# Specialized innovation system facilitators: innovation brokers

- Winch & Courtney (2007): “an organisation acting as a member of a network of actors [..] that is focused neither on the organisation nor the implementation of innovations, but on enabling other organisations to innovate”



# Innovation broker functions

- Connecting demand and supply in knowledge infrastructure (or seekers and solvers) and forging linkages in broader innovation system
- Main tasks: demand articulation, network formation, innovation process management (i.e. network facilitation)
- At different system aggregation levels
- Both national, regional, sectoral, topical scope
- Often publicly-privately funded



# Specialized IB's relatively new phenomenon

- Questions on embedding (Van der Meulen et al., 2005) :
  - Configuration of relations in which the intermediary organization is involved, including also its resource position.
  - Phases in the development of an intermediary organization, from its early development towards institutionalization and situations of crisis and institutional change.
  - Competences and degree of independence of the intermediary organization, i.e. the degree to which it develops as an 'autonomous identity'.





# Case of the Dutch agricultural sector



# Background: changing knowledge infrastructure

- Privatization of public agricultural research and extension: pluralistic market of research and KIBS providers has emerged
- Heterogeneous knowledge demands from (multifunctional) agriculture
- Policy focus on innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainability





# Main points of concern

- Fragmentation of R&D and KIBS service providers: information asymmetry
- Lack of knowledge infrastructure interaction, coordination and synergy
- Deficient connection education-practice, practice-policy, practice-science
- Change towards interactive ‘demand driven’ research desired – but different institutional background and ‘languages’
- Adoption of innovation system and system innovation approaches



# Typology innovation brokers

- 6 types observed (also in mixed form):
  1. Innovation consultants aimed at individuals
  2. Innovation consultants aimed at collectives
  3. Peer network brokers
  4. Systemic instruments (research planning and foresight/backcasting/niche-experiments)
  5. Internet-based portals
  6. Broker arrangements at the practice-education interface



# Achievements

- Innovation brokers mediate between different 'worlds', increasing mutual understanding and broadening perspectives
- Innovation brokers (aim to) act neutrally/impartially
- Renew knowledge/innovation system interaction
- Innovation placed high on agenda: innovation capacity building
- Help induce shift towards demand driven R&D and KIBS



# Tensions

- Balancing demands from different parties - different accountabilities (may threaten neutrality/impartiality)
- Possible function ambiguity with R&D and KIBS providers or others
- Maintaining neutrality in innovation process and - system in light of 'creative destruction' can be hard
- Brokerage function is quite intangible, so low willingness-to-pay and attribution problems in evaluation threaten continuity
- Incoherence/inconsistency in innovation support policy



# Policy implications

- Some form of continuous public support appears necessary
- Mandate should be well defined (What is public, what is private?)
- Making explicit the expectations and desired returns on investment is needed
- Adequate 'soft' evaluation criteria are needed
- More attention needed to coherence between individual instruments



# Some future lines for research

- Longitudinal analysis of innovation brokerage impact at organizational/innovation project level
- Interplay between 'external' innovation brokers and 'internal' boundary spanners
- Attitudes towards innovation broker functions due to 'learning by using/experiencing'
- Longitudinal analysis of innovation broker development in the face of changing institutional environment



# Thank you for your attention!

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