

Local knowledge-based development: What can local governments do for it?

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Abstract:

The paper stresses that local governments are very important actors in local development, but to be able to fulfil this function it is necessary to improve their capacities and to increase their local knowledge. The author outlines the theoretical frames of knowledge-based governance and development, like the urban regime theory, local knowledge, and regional innovation theories. Based on her own empirical research experiences the author introduces the main characteristics of the Hungarian local government system which tends to be limited in its scope and competences in local development due to the legislation in the last years referring. The paper concludes that the European, so called place-based development policy cannot be implemented in this very centralised governance context.

Keywords: local knowledge, local development, local governance, innovation, planning, urban regime

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Introduction

The relationship of knowledge, power and governance is discussed by sociology, political science from a remarkably broad approach since the general context of power, institutions, actors, knowledge holders, networks, social participation are all equally relevant. The public policy literature is focusing on interdependences among producing, expanding and impacts of knowledge. The integrated public policy approach emphasizes the fact that the ability of the governance system has crucial impact both on production, transfer and the use of knowledge (Hearn- Rooney, 2008). The paper's approach is complex, setting these phenomena into spatial frames and linking them with development policy. The reason of this specific focus is supported by recent political ambitions (not just in Hungary) to strengthen the role of local economic development aimed at decreasing regional inequalities. If we assume that local economic development is not just social economy in underdeveloped rural areas but an important action space of economic modernisation and improvement of efficiency, and at the same time an important instrument of decreasing the alarmingly growing territorial inequalities we shall raise the question, whether local governments are able to base local development on local knowledge and lead these processes? The author's firm conviction is that the answer is yes if local governments are enabled for this role.

Local knowledge

Speaking about increasing economic and social importance of knowledge is commonplace and the science is already far beyond recognising the differentiation of knowledge types necessary for development. As agreed in the last decades the circle of useful knowledge is broader than the scientific one. The term of knowledge society has gradually expanded, further notions have emerged as its alternatives like information society, post-modern society, networked society (Stehr, 2007) which are focusing not just on production and transfer but also on interactions of knowledge.

The complex analysis of knowledge society has been completed by Bell (1973) who argues that the post-industrial society is knowledge society for two reasons, first, because the resources of innovation are stemming from research and development (R+D) producing a new relationship between science and technology and second, because the income and employment of the society are based mostly on knowledge. Already at the beginning of the post-modern era Inglehart (1990) regarded the wellbeing of larger groups of society as priority as compared with the interest of science. The opinion on the direct role of science has been generally accepted that the knowledge of social and human science is less important than that of natural science, and during the modernisation basic and applied researches have been many times confronted. The traditional normative disciplines are gradually replaced by action-oriented disciplines (Crozier, 1975: 32).

Information and its results, according to Castells, create new aspects and modes of knowledge partially due to the role of social sciences. The creation, production, and transfer of knowledge become the main resources of economic productivity and power (Castells, 1996). Castells also pointed out that the time and space are important ultimate elements of knowledge production, the world based on Internet does not mean at all that geography, history and institutions would disappear, places remain but inserted into networks (Castells, Ince, 2006).

The interpretative and transmitting role of experts being not scientists is reinforced in the knowledge-based economy and society since in the changing local circumstances it is necessary to make knowledge accessible. The complexity of linkages and the scale of demanded resources explain why has the group of experts representing knowledge-based professions got into the centre of attention. The so-called epistemic communities are a network of experts which has a crucial impact on policy formulation (Haas, 1992). It does not mean that technocrats rule the society or politics. Crozier (1963), the sociologist of

public administration thinks that administrative knowledge or expertise possessed by bureaucrats has prominent importance in public administration. The external expert knowledge, intuitions, innovations are to be channelled into internal mechanisms where the interests and values of bureaucrats and politicians prevail. The trust towards experts is weak although we more and more rely on them. Max Weber thought that just private entrepreneurs are independent from bureaucracy since they are able to possess and use the information needed for running their business due to their own knowledge and institutional background (Stehr, 2007).

The role of knowledge is relevant outside of the economy as well. Civil society in the knowledge society is equipped by new instruments and mechanisms in order to improve the social adaptability by so called reflexive knowledge. Experts advocate nation wide and local pressure groups and other civil associations bridging the gap between laics and expert knowledge.

The so-called cognitive democracy (Theys, 2002) reflects on this phenomenon mirroring the recognition of more efficiency of political participation based on knowledge. The political participation, nowadays, does not just legitimate the decisions but its aim is to understand and influence them or even to oppose the measures initiated by central governments. Governments should know the micro political, individual, civic movements and ambitions which are parts of local knowledge (Inglehart, 1990). Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy and the deliberative governance strategies are in strong connection with the co-operation of epistemic communities and the citizens and their communities. The basis of this co-operation is trust and legitimacy which needs creation of special local dialogue techniques.

The term of knowledge-based governance is rarely used (Furukawa-Hoshino, 2001) instead we find the term of evidence-based governance in the literature. They both emphasise the fact that public policy making is built more or less on expert knowledge and evaluation provided especially by management science although its concrete practice is often discussed object to criticism (Best-Holmes, 2010). As mentioned, these kinds of knowledge can not at all act automatically and everywhere. In recent years the question is more frequently raised where are the limits of technocratic expertise against democratic legitimacy (Fraser-Moleketi, 2012), what is the relationship of bureaucracy to political representation, which kind of knowledge is necessary for governance and how these types of knowledge are channelled into decision-making processes? It is really very difficult question of „speaking truth to power” (Stone, 2012:349) since knowledge holders and politicians are dependent on each other.

Innovation, technology, knowledge-based economy are well known and often mentioned terms in strong connection with economic competitiveness. The literature on innovation and its institutional setting is focusing mostly on regional and national scales. The rationale of the national, centralised innovation system is that the expansion of innovation born in the business sector is promoted by the public sector supporting R & D firm activities, decreasing the costs of innovation efforts. This model recently prioritises the human capital development, the private actors of knowledge production and the learning processes itself. The vitality of the original Danish pattern (Aalborg) is supported by high and less polarised incomes, by strong social solidarity, by the equality of genders and developed democracy. It is an important experience that quick changes in innovation and social learning are manageable just when the stabilizing support of social capital exists (Lundvall et al, 2002: 225).

The strong state activity in the national innovation system gives dynamism for both economic branches and regions in the global competition, which is especially important in the „Southern” (less developed) countries. The sense of the so-called platform approach (Asheim, et al 2007) is that the strategy based on regional advantages and institutions cumulates local knowledge and links them with international, remote networks (cited by Vale, 2011). Because of the very diverse competitiveness of the regions others claim that there are no real regional innovation systems, regions are just places of national innovation

systems having locally no influence on the national innovation policy (Uyarra-Flanagan, 2010). The so-called regional innovation systems (RIS) however put emphasis on experiments and communication initiated from bottom up (Cook, 2008). The sense of all regional innovation systems is the recognition and use of geographical closeness in spite of the increasing importance of distant networks (Vale, 2011). Enterprises and politicians of networked regions more and more realize that simply copying of patterns is insufficient (Cook, 2008: 406). It is agreed that the local knowledge and interactivity have crucial role in both territorially embedded regional and regionalized national innovation systems (Asheim-Isaksen, 2002). Closeness matters in organisational and social learning, the trust towards distant networks is minor, local buzz can not be substituted by uniform models (Morgan, 2004).

And now we have arrived to the term of local knowledge. As the knowledge itself and its forms of existing are being differentiated the context of knowledge also becomes more and more important. Based on various knowledge forms (institutional, milieu, expert, market, production, local etc) and on their relations Matthisen (2005) introduced the term of 'knowledgescape' emphasising that during decision-making or public policy action the mix of knowledge forms are emerging. The knowledgescape may help in understanding of learning and decision-making processes. Local knowledge can be regarded as a 'mixed knowledge'. This is not just about that place represents always a specific concrete mix of different types of knowledge but it is also about the strengthening role of knowledge on the place among other knowledge types. Geertz raises the question: who knows the river better, the hydrologist or the swimmer? It depends on what do we mean by the notion of knowledge and for what aim we use it (Geertz, 1992:134)? In the next paragraph we investigate how can the least moveable knowledge (Vale, 2011), the local one be used for assisting of local governance and economic development.

Local knowledge-based governance

Governance systems extremely differ from each other in terms of how much competences and room of manoeuvring (independency) they grant for local governments, so how much are these centralized or decentralized. Decentralization can contribute to the democratization of the whole political system, but the quality of decentralization depends also on the quality of politics of the given country. A further question is whether the governance performance and within that the efficiency of the economic development policy are linked with the territorial structure of the government. The optimal balance of decentralization and centralization is a very complex issue depending on timely and territorially changing facts and therefore it is difficult to identify stable general principles (Charbit, 2011). The creators of the so-called decentralization index have approached with subtlety to decentralisation, distinguishing administrative, political, decision-making, qualitative and quantitative financial and executive decentralisations. They found in their comparative analyses that countries with good economic performance are more decentralised (Müller, 2009). Consequently, local and regional governments are really able to contribute to the economic performance. There are opposite research results as well which prove that decentralisation can cause the increase of inflation and the growth of state debt (Saito, 2011:493). Others think that science has not yet obtained sufficient evidences and adding to that appropriate methodology so far for the assessment of advantages and disadvantages of decentralisation (Banting-Costa-Font, 2010). Generally, it is hard to distinguish the legitimating impacts of democratic rules and the good performance and efficiency in public services etc. It is even harder to identify relations among democracy, efficiency and decentralisation when the latest empirical researches found direct interdependency between performance of bureaucracy (and local governments) and citizen satisfaction with democracy (Ariely, 2013).

Despite all theoretical and methodological cautiousness, it remains certain that it is to be governed locally, local governments have an impact on local living conditions and local economic development as well. Insuring local public legal independence is however not enough. Without taking part in public

tasks, or having a share from budget and community resources, organisational capacity of local governments the system of local governance is hollowing out (Baldersheim, Rose, 2010:3). The functioning of local governance is basically determined by the overall governance environment. At the case of bad general governance performance local governments are also not able to manage their tasks successfully although there is correctional opportunity in the cooperation of governance levels that is inappropriate macro governance conditions can be counterbalanced by good local governance and inversely. The optimum is of course the synergy when good performances of both governance levels cumulate, assist each other. Thus, decentralised systems ensure the chance for local governments to shape the frames of locally optimal decision-making. Exploiting of this chance is by no means easy, the ever challenge of local governance is whether it is able to manage problems in the right time and place.

Local governance is good when if it is able to give locally fitting answers. The feature of local governments is providing direct participation since being closer to the citizens, it is not closed within branch logic and therefore it can make complex decisions based also on local knowledge. A real contradiction is that the more complex the decision-making, the bigger is the danger of selection of actors to be involved. The openness of government is broader at easier decisions however in the case of complex decisions the only chance of consensus is in mechanisms of bargaining (Abbott (1996). Messy problems need distinct solutions where experiments and mistakes are natural. Such messy systems learn more easily, and are able to adapt, have advocacy communities in a background as the choir in the Greek drama (Taylor, 2000:1031). There is no single recipe, the decision-making is steadily shaping and learning has different phases.

Healey (2004) links the model of locally creative governance with attributes below:

Level of decision making	Dimensions of governance
Special episodes	Pluralism of actors
	Open arenas
	Stimulating environment
Governance processes	Pluralism of networks, loosely bounded coalitions
	Open selection process of stakeholders
	Open debates
	Enabling, self-supporting practices
	Formal rules respecting local initiatives
Culture of governance	Appreciation of multi culturalism
	Utilitarianism, tolerance, reflectiveness
	Self-regulation, supporting attitude

Source: Healey, 2004:18

Alongside of these levels and dimensions of concrete local governance solutions are becoming analysable. Involvement is understood not just as participation of most important customary institutions and sectors because it is necessary making the invisible visible, the complex, tacit local knowledge. Governance innovation does not mean always new institutions or actors rather special attention to discourses and practices of functioning. Everywhere there is a need for different things: motivation of new actors, inclusion of business etc. Different dynamics are to be channelled for each concrete target. The capacity for strategic steering, the „leadership” listens to dangers, supports initiatives, builds

synergies, deals with tensions, limits, preserving the governance culture. Nowadays the international experiences play crucial role in using local knowledge and local governance innovation. Successful mayors participate in international networks based on their own knowledge, linking the most special local knowledge with the global one (Beal, Pinson, 2014). The learning process of local governance requires the time of one generation and also the continuous demand for renewal of governance. Solely on the basis of great tolerance and sensitivity it is recognisable that lot of energy and knowledge of different individuals and groups are needed for the development of a city or region. The world of local governments is colourful, they are unevenly able to motivate local knowledge or to adapt to the changes. The empowerment and instruments granted by the government system are only the starting point for the successful 'good' local governance, its important driving forces are local knowledge, information on local circumstances, ability for cooperation with partners.

Local economic development

Theories of regional science and economics identify the resources of economic competitiveness and regional inequalities in different facts as: agglomeration advantages, innovation, labour force, social capital, quality of territorial capital etc. (Enyedi, 2000, Lengyel, 2006, Camagni, Capello, 2012, Vale, 2011). There are lot of discussions on the ideal territorial scale for development policy, and what kind of scale is understood as local economic development at all. When we are approaching to economic development from the aspect of the role of knowledge and innovation, different scales and actors are preferred. The regions became the most important actors in the last decades after the economics and regional economics pointed to the necessity of mobilization of indigenous driving forces, to the economy of scale of the regions in economic clusters, innovation, certain infrastructures and services. In the lack of competitive economic basis especially in rural and underdeveloped urban regions it is necessary to mobilize the non-spreadable local assets, knowledge by governmental measures.

It is about any of the territorial dimensions the efficiency of development policy depends not only on economy of scale and macro-economical subsidies but also on governance capacities, its social embeddedness, complexity, its open or closed, hierarchical or horizontal nature. Although local economic development is a multilayered policy, local governments are the most important actors (Mezei, 2006). It matters however, on what kind of social capital and trust the economic development networks are built. Material, knowledge and social capital are equally important factors of the success of actors and stakeholders, harmonization of them is the mission of local economic development.

The development and governance of rural and urban, developed and poor regions is often happening alongside separate targets and mechanisms whereas their interdependency and cooperation would be evident. Not only the dynamic regions having knowledge intensive economy shall utilise local knowledge and assist local learning processes but the rural ones also where the local resources and community based and ecologically dominated social economy exists. Good examples are the so called 'locavore' movements which appreciate the closeness of production and consumption as ethical and ecological values. The locality, geographical space bounded so called, indigenous driving forces and local knowledge can result besides sustainability also competitiveness if the local production assisted by local marketing is linked to global processes (Torre, Traversac, 2011). The governance of rural areas is based on the force of closeness and neighbourhood, it has stronger communitarian, associational character, similarly to the urban governance, the interests of business lobbies covering broader areas and knowledge networks have great influence. Governance of rural areas is also not exempt from conflicts, serious tensions and confrontations among various interest groups can emerge. Especially in questions of land use and environmental protection the interests are confronting in the first place not among local but rather remote actors referring to the power asymmetry in the governance of rural areas and villages due to the fact that the dominant positions in local politics are not always possessed by local residents.

An especially exciting challenge is the relationship of the city and its surrounding district where the suburban settlements are constrained in the role of servile satellites. The asymmetric power relations mark the development policy of the region as well. The prevailing of aspects of agriculture and diversified economic development based on local resources depends on the ability of participants in the decision making to represent their interest, of course, besides in what manner local economic development policy fits into the general regional and sector policies (Perrier-Cornet, 2011). The traditional nature of American local government is the dominant role of business sector (Stone, 2005), but the informal networks, the 'vital regimes' (Horlings, 2011) linking economic and civil actors emerge also in Europe in the development of rural areas powered by cities. Their vitality stems from their intellectual superiority supporting the common goals by local and institutional knowledge.

The governance of urban territories is more frequent subject of interest in the development policy, first due to the territorial function second to economic development potential of the cities. The urban economy is obviously more globalised and less space dependent, but the local features of the cities are being up graded exactly by the knowledge-based economy and by the economic role of culture and most recently of the creativity. The terms of creative class used by Florida, creative city, the tolerance and milieu in development policy are all based on local knowledge and creativity, measured by the so-called creativity index (although the methodology is questioned in the literature) in order to know to what extent a city is able to attract the creative class and to utilise this knowledge for urban economic development (Florida, 2002).

The regime theory mentioned before was elaborated originally in the frame of urban development policy. The so-called urban regime school put down the development of the city to the coalition of mostly non-public actors having more influence on the decision making than the elected local government. The position within a network it is up to the knowledge on social transactions, capacity to act and the opportunity to control the resources. Instead of institutions and forums of traditional democracy, the theory focuses on knowing local circumstances which influence the behaviour of actors that is on the local knowledge (Stone, 2005). In local networks described by regime theory the actors of innovation, the creative intelligence, the local knowledge producers who links the concrete local ideas with public power, all these have places. It is however important to emphasise that these regimes are polarised in the sense of power and for example in the USA prefer the economic actors and are as compared to European cities socially less sensitive. It is not an accident that Stone considers as the biggest challenge to counterbalance social inequalities (Stone, 2005).

From institutional point of view especially the universities and R&D are emphasised in connection with knowledge and local economic development. It is an old experience that universities have an important role in local economic development and in knowledge production on one side with training, with presence of creative, innovative intelligence and on the other side with common R&D projects (Abel, Deitz, 2012). There are clear evidences that research institutions and universities generate the biggest impact on the local development with the highest quality but far not everywhere (Hill, 2006). The recent researches provide evidence also on the manner how competition among universities contributes to local development and employment (Cattaneo et al, 2013).

The local use of knowledge accumulated in a region or city is not automatic at all. The connecting of universities and local economy is based on many facts among them on the role profile of universities is also very important. The local mission dominates among the activities of the so-called regionally responsible, servicing universities (Gál-Zsibók, 2013) which is not limited to scientific, technological researches but it also reflects to other local needs. The helpdesk model of the University of Brighton focused for example on linking the demand of local community with knowledge holders of the university (Hart, et al. 2009). Many of other examples would be necessary to provide just tastes on solutions how

local governments' efforts and local knowledge resources are summing up and have an impact on local development.

Hungarian parallels

The Hungarian development policy has recognised the role of knowledge in both, sector (innovation and economic) strategies and in shaping of regional development policy for a long time. We started to introduce models and institutions also using knowledge for serving development targets although their efficiency is continuously criticised (Török, 2006).

Even the national and regional governance models do not support the local governance aiming to connect local knowledge and economic development. Whereas during the systemic change we established such a local government system where local governments enjoyed great autonomy but the independency alone is not enough for efficient local governance. We set up regional strategies in the artificially created regions but only loose and instable networks emerged between business companies and knowledge producers due to lack of regional decentralisation, anomalies in resource allocation, lack of transfer institutions, unhealthy high concentration of R&D capacities in the capital etc. (Csizmadia, 2009). The asymmetrical system dominated by public financed innovation institutions and development agencies is instable, lacks trust and predictability which would be important for economic and innovation actors, knowledge holders. The institutions established for the absorption of European and other public resources and „development coalitions and epistemic communities” emerged in their environment are based on either long-term common interests nor on own local forces. Although the creative economy has already emerged in Hungary but its impact is less perceptible as compared to knowledge intensive industry and it is concentrated almost exclusively in the capital and therefore they are unable to contribute to the regional catch up (Kovács Z et al, 2011).

Not just the necessary central and local resources were however missing but the culture of cooperation essential for mobilisation of local knowledge as well. Our study (Gál, 2013) proved that the regional innovation system is particularly fragile. The institutional system has been shaping by ad hoc initiations according to project cycles which produced losses both in organisational knowledge and capacity less motivating the actors for long term thinking. The hectic changes led to functional overlapping and capacity fragmentation by leaving the institutions time to time alone and by interrupting local initiations. The institutional capacities mostly do not reach the critical mass therefore they are mainly focusing on self-preservation.

The so-called Leader programmes could be opportunities in rural areas to link together local knowledge and activity of local communities in many European Countries. But the original logic of Leader is not easy to enforce in Hungary according to the experiences so far (Kovács D, et al, 2011).

Similarly, to other Central European countries stable networks of urban development regimes did not come into existence (Lux, 2012), the knowledge base of many cities has not been exploited and embedded yet. Of course, due to the legal obligation of urban planning urban development strategies were developed time to time and during the plan-making the local elite and sometimes the broader local society also had to face urban development conditions and demands. But the necessity of knowledge transfer has not yet been recognised in many places and there were no efforts to use locally adjusted mechanisms for difficult excavating and channelling of local knowledge at al. The local political elite ignores both cognitive, deliberative democracy and knowledge-based development, networks are rather understood with negative connotation in the vocabulary of public policy. Domestic urban empirical researches found that although local elites are aware of the importance of local universities and knowledge basis in local economic development but they do not realize the role of local government leadership (Csizmadia-Páthy, 2010, Lux, 2012/b, Pálné Kovács, 2012).

The picture is more controversial in the mirror of shaping the new centralised governance and local government model after 2010 and further the developments in higher education and research are not favourable either. Due to this strong centralisation the local governments lost a number of public service competences and financial sources. As a kind of compensation governmental promises have been issued and also some steps have been taken in national planning that local and county governments will be entitled to development policy not just in European cohesion policy but also in economic development. This is supported by the EU regulation as well in schemes of so called integrated territorial investments (ITI) and community led local development (CLLD) (Finta, 2012). These schemes suppose that local governments are active motivators and strategic planners of integrated development projects but not exclusive actors at all. These challenges facing local governments can not be successfully answered under the circumstances outlined above.

The formal empowerment for influencing local development does not seem to be enough due to the limited instruments. In the lack of instruments and resources local governments will lose the opportunity for possessing and channelling of local knowledge into development. So, we may repeat the mistake which has been characteristic in European development policy so far that is endless chain of individual projects will absorb the money shifting the responsibility to the unsure future for the sustainability and for fitting of the new investments. The weak, limited local governments will hardly be able to learn governance of local knowledge-based development using fine techniques and experiments. And still nothing is about territorial concentration of knowledge, knowledge partners, the state of the art of universities and R&D sector, innovation transfer institutions etc. So, there are things to be learned both on the top and the bottom.

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