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EUROPEAN REGIONAL COMPETITIVENESS, INNOVATION AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS

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Abstract: Regional competitiveness, innovation and knowledge networks (in a European Research Area) are central elements in the current Europe 2020 development strategy for “smart growth”. This paper argues that there is a tension between place-based development strategies aimed for by the EU in the renewed cohesion policy proposals on the one side, and the interregional European network determinism of competitiveness, innovation and knowledge creation on the other. The European Union aims at stimulating collaborative knowledge networks across member states in order to enhance learning and economic integration on regional and firm levels. The geography of innovation traditionally concentrates on localised knowledge spillovers as carriers of economic growth. Spillovers are localized to the extent that the underlying mechanisms are geographically bounded. University-industry research collaboration - as an important carrier of knowledge spillovers - is not strictly limited to the regional scale. In a growing field of contributions in a “geography of knowledge networks” literature, the effect of university-industry collaboration networks on innovation and knowledge spillovers is mapped and the discussion is extended from physical proximity to relational proximity. The European Union also elaborates on the importance of competitiveness for economic growth in regions. Regional policy reducing disparities between the levels of development of regions and countries of the European Union should take place in an appropriate place based development policy (Barca, 2009). This paper, similarly for innovation and knowledge networks, argues that for determining the effects of such policies the locational and network determinants of competitiveness should be known and taken into account. This goes beyond the well-known benchmarks on locational competition, as these do not take interregional network characteristics into account.