

# Clusters and temporary geographical proximity

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# Introduction: from polarization to clusters

- The initial works of Perroux, Myrdal, Hirschman.... on growth poles
- And then Porter (1990)...
- Clusters at the core of growth policies or of industrial policies (see French Poles de Compétitivité)
- What is the relevance of clusters in terms of knowledge transmission?
- A reading in terms of proximity analysis

# I. A critical assessment in terms of proximity analysis

- I.1. Geographical proximity: a brief definition

It is:

- binary (« far from » / « close to»)
- relative (to means of transport, to social representations, to financial constraints...)
- a social product, which can be considered as a given constraint at a period  $t$

# I. A critical assessment in terms of proximity analysis

- I.2. Organized proximity: a brief definition

It is the ability of an organization (firm, community, network, institution...) to make its members interact easily by means of :

- routines, rules, professional norms...  
***(membership logic)***
- social codes, shared values, beliefs, expectations ***(similarity logic)***

# I. A critical assessment in terms of proximity analysis

- I.3. Clusters and proximities
- Cluster are an ideal type case because they involve the presence of both geographical and organized proximities
- Firms and laboratories are located on the same site, at a small distance (geographical proximity)
- Clients-providers relations, exchange of knowledge, co-operations... (organized proximity)

# I. A critical assessment in terms of proximity analysis

- I.4. On the negative effects of geographical proximity
- GP is a source of tension and can lead to the emergence of conflicts between local actors (rarely underlined in the literature)
- Economic intelligence
- The weakness of strong ties (routinization, same knowledge base between local firms)
- Spatial lock-in (Mobility is not always possible)

## II. Clusters: back to the basics

- II.1. Temporary geographical proximity
- There are an increasing nomadism and mobility of persons, goods and information
- The need for geographical proximity may be fulfilled by people mobility
- The constraint of geographical proximity is not permanent in the activity of knowledge transfer

## II. Clusters: back to the basics

- II.1. Temporary geographical proximity
- ***Temporary geographical proximity***: short or medium term stays can ensure face to face relations and knowledge transfer
- Big firms can benefit from the advantages of geographical proximity (and knowledge transfer) without (de) localization
- SMEs are often trapped. They are obliged to localize because of the lack of resources (human, financial...) needed to travel in order to take advantage of knowledge transfers



## II. Clusters: back to the basics

- II.2. Organized proximity first
- Geographical proximity must be activated by organized proximity
- Economic relations are embedded into social relations
- The key role played by institutions at the local level

## II. Clusters: back to the basics

- II.3. Clusters vs. traditional factors of agglomeration
- The agglomeration of firms and labs within clusters may also be explained by traditional factors of localization, such as:
  - low land prices
  - tax benefits
  - local labor markets
  - ...

# Conclusion

- The success of clusters is not an accident
- They are very good policy tools
- They are at the heart of regional production systems
- They help in:
  - the diffusion of knowledge at the local level
  - the promotion of the image of the local system