

What to do when the shoes start to tighten along the journey? Opportunity spaces, innovation, and regional resilience

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Introdução

Common sense dictates that ‘if you are going to walk long distances, you should have a good pair of shoes.’ But what if those shoes start to tighten along the journey? This metaphor is the starting point for discussing resilience as a desirable capacity for a region to traverse and develop economic paths while exposed to recurrent shocks. Analogies and metaphors are common when dealing with resilience, as the word originated in the material sciences to refer to stability and the ability to return to equilibrium.

Problema de Pesquisa e Objetivo

However, the socio-economic complexity of regions goes beyond comparisons with objects, with a reaction and reorientation of the economic structure to a disturbance. Despite this understanding, the literature on the innovation-regional economic resilience nexus has focused on pre-existing capacities, with limited contributions when dealing with post-shock adaptation or transformation dynamics (Viana et al., 2023). This study seeks to fill this gap by comparing innovation in response to a shock in the process of regional economic resilience.

Fundamentação Teórica

This study was based on the understanding that the dimensions of regional resilience provide an analytical lens for examining how regions cope with shocks (Martin & Sunley, 2015). Complementarily, this paper assumed that metatheoretical concepts such as expectations and opportunity spaces provide a deeper understanding of how regional actors respond to a shock, taking into account the past and an orientation towards the future (see Grillitsch & Sotarauta, 2020).

Metodologia

Referring to the metaphor that started the text, this research addressed footwear as an industrial context to conduct case studies in the municipalities of Franca and Campina Grande, Brazil, considering the COVID-19 shock. To support the evidence, a descriptive, qualitative-quantitative investigation was carried out with 30 interviews, reports and official data. The transcripts and documents were subjected to thematic analysis, correspondence analysis and frequency distribution of categorical data. In addition, quantitative data were analyzed in an exploratory manner.

Análise dos Resultados

The results show common reactions to the shock, such as measures to absorb the impact and maintain the status quo, and local support. However, innovations were introduced differently in each region. Innovations in marketing and sales processes and in information and communication systems were characteristic of the Franca case. In Campina Grande, the low vulnerability of the leading firm shaped the resilience of the industry in the region, while smaller firms sought to survive by operating in available markets and introducing new products.

Conclusão

It can be concluded that it is not only a question of how the duration of the shock relates to the degree of change, or how the relationship between the type of innovation and regional resilience depends on the nature of the shock, which are partial explanations presented in this literature. The search for regional resilience based on the adaptation or transformation of the economy may not be possible if the spaces of opportunity are limited, leaving an attempt to recover pre-crisis levels of

employment or wealth, or to adjust to a lower development path.

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