



Copenhagen
Business School
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

Innovation Policy in the Age of Governance: What Goals, What Role for the State?

Susana Borrás

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A Critical View of the Field of Innovation Systems and Innovation Studies....

- We know so much, and are still blind...
- Who is doing what? ...
- Cross-national comparative analysis... too superficial and decontextualized?

My overall point is that we need to bring the state back in in innovation studies.



Some starting point propositions...

- **We must avoid replicating the "policy implications' syndrome"**
- **We need to separate clearly the analytical from the normative dimensions.**
- **We need to acknowledge the different types of state**
- **We need to acknowledge the very deep changes the past few decades:
Globalisation & Governance.**
- **We need to acknowledge that innovation is well beyond issues of
economic growth and R&D policies.**



What is the State?

Public authority (political powers + laws/institutions/organisations)





My suggestion for five core issues in a research agenda bringing the state back in in innovation studies

1. Analyse State-action failure and success
2. Analyse the State as a bounded and boundary actor
3. Analyse the State (lack of) learning processes and capacity
4. Identify and analyse current State-action & goals in complex socio-technical systems and sectors of the (well beyond R&D policy as such)
5. Analyse real-life problems in the innovation system: 10 activities



1. Analyse State-action per se: Failure and success, benign or not?

- Failure and success:
 - What it does well
 - what it does incompletely/unsuccessfully
 - what it says it does, but never does
- Benign role of the State?
 - States and public-supported firms in 'nasty' sectors (fossil fuel, weapons production & export, etc)
 - State employees or individuals appropriating state property.
 - Responsible Research and innovation: many times absent even at the discursive level
 - Difficult balance between state-driven directionality (and interference) vs. autonomy of science.



2. Analyse the State as a bounded actor

- Plenty of literature assumes a ‘superman’ state, a state that can do everything, and is free to do it.
- In the age of globalisation and governance, the state is highly bounded actor, dependent on other actors: i.e.
 - in Denmark more than 10% of R&D performed by universities is funded by non-profit sector.
 - Transnational flows put forward new ways of collaboration-competition.
- The state is typically highly disarticulated internally:
 - cross-sectors, and multi-level state structure.
 - Most typically: Pluricentric dimension of the state.
- Charles Lindblom ”Mudling through” is more often than visionary, unison marching state action.



3. Analyse Learning by the State: Conditions for the State to facilitate change

- Models suggested yesterday for innovation policy 3.0 need an essential framework condition: the ability and capacity of the State to learn
- Bengt-Åke Lundvall's legacy: "learning economy": Adaptability of organisations and institutions; widespread knowledge and competence development.
- The state is key for:
 - stimulating learning in the society in its broadest way.
 - Policy learning
- BUT, depends on organisational capacity of the state => Absorptive capacity.



4. Identify and analyse current State-action goals in their socio-technical system context

- State action goals for innovation are more than those officially stated in R&D&I policies.
- Look concretely what the state does:
 - Economic growth
 - Social development
 - Public health
 - Defence and security
 - Environmental protection, etc.
- Issues: overlapping, competing, undefined goals; or simply understated.
- We need to study analytically the way in which these collide or colude in different cases.



5. Analyse real-life problems in the innovation system

There is a gap between:

- Very abstract & deductively defined policy rationales.
- Real-life problems and dilemmas for policy makers

We need to analyse real-life problems in the innovation system.

Policy can be part of the solution, but might be part of the problem too.

A way of approaching is task by focusing on diagnosis of problems in specific areas of innovation systems (Edquist 2011).