

A.VII.4. Spatial proximity and technology

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Definition: The literature highlights the distinction between two main categories of proximity: geographical proximity and organized proximity. Both proximities refer, above all, to potentialities given to individuals, groups, and human actions in general, in their technical and institutional dimensions. This potential may or may not exist at a given time, and therefore may or may not be usable or actionable through the actions and representations of the actors.

History: Geographical proximity is above all about distance. In its simplest definition, it is the number of meters or kilometers that separate two entities. But it is relative in three ways: in terms of the morphological characteristics of the spaces in which activities take place; in terms of the availability of transport infrastructure, and in terms of the financial resources of the individuals who use these transport infrastructures.

Theory: Geographical proximity is neutral in essence. It is the human actions and perceptions that give it a more or less positive or negative dimension, as well as certain usefulness. It is the way in which actors use it that matters. It can be activated or mobilized by the actions of economic and social actors. Depending on their strategies or strategic choices, or according to their perceptions of their environment, the behaviors and attitudes of these actors vary, and they mobilize geographical proximity differently.

Conceptualization: There are two main types of geographical proximity: temporary and permanent. Permanent geographical proximity is intuitive and corresponds to the relative distance between two locations of people or places. Temporary geographical proximity (TGP) constitutes one form of geographical proximity that enables actors to temporarily interact face to face with one another, whether these actors are individuals or organizations, such as firms or laboratories. Space matters, but in a way that consists of temporary face-to-face contact between two or several individuals. TGP corresponds to the possibility of satisfying needs for face-to-face contact between actors by traveling to different

locations. This traveling generates opportunities for moments of geographical proximity, which vary in duration but are always limited in time. TGP is limited to certain times; this form of geographical proximity should not be mistaken for a permanent co-location of firms or laboratories. The necessity of TGP is embodied in the existence of places that are made especially for TGP-based activities. In the case of private individuals, these can be conferences, theme parks, or recreational parks. In the case of firms or laboratories, they are specialized venues, like trade shows, conferences, exhibitions, or common 'platforms' of project teams. Geographical proximity can be an advantage or an obstacle to the development of harmonious relations between actors or stakeholders.

New developments: The search for geographical proximity refers to the quest by some actors, for geographical proximity to other economic or social actors, to natural or artificial resources, or to places or technical objects. It can be permanent or temporary. The need for permanent geographical proximity is met by being in what is considered an appropriate location or by moving and settling in a place deemed more likely to help the actors concerned meet their needs or conduct certain activities. The need for TGP can be fulfilled without having to settle in a different place, but by traveling and undertaking occasional trips of a limited duration. Unwanted geographical proximity corresponds to cases of actors finding themselves in situations of unwanted geographical proximity to people, activities, technical objects, or places, without being able to move and change locations. Geographical proximity is the source of negative externalities, which correspond to the disadvantages of being in proximity to objects of concern, such as a polluted site or a waste incineration plant, for example. It is also the case when firms find themselves in proximity to competitors that seek to appropriate part of their knowledge through industrial espionage, for instance, or by hiring their best engineers away from them. In addition, organized proximity is a potential that can be activated or mobilized. It refers to the different ways of being close to other actors, regardless of the degree of geographical proximity between individuals. Just like geographical proximity, organized proximity refers to a potential that is neutral in essence. It is the perceptions and actions of individuals that give it a more or

less positive or negative dimension, and therefore a certain usefulness.

Policy relevance: The logic of belonging refers to the fact that two or several actors belong to the same relationship graph or even to the same social network, whether their relation is direct or intermediated. It can depend on the sector they operate in; in this case, they share a common creative or innovative capital. It can be measured in terms of degrees of connectivity, reflecting more or less high degrees of organized proximity and therefore a more or less great potential for interaction or common action.

Prospect: The logic of similarity corresponds to a mental adherence to common categories; it manifests itself in small cognitive distances between individuals. They can be people who are connected to one another through common projects, or share the same cultural, religious, or other, values or symbols. The logic of similarity possesses two facets. It can develop within a reciprocal relationship; a relationship that shortens the cognitive distance between the actors involved (common project, common education, and knowledge

circulating within a network), but it can also emerge from a common basis, facilitating communication between strangers (for example, diasporas).

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