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Ecosystems in Places & Partnerships as Herding Spaces: The Case of Circular Textile Ecosystems in Finland

Abstract

There has been a growing interest in explaining the role of place in different organisational settings. Yet, there is a lack of understanding of how a place can shape inter-organisational relations in partnerships and ecosystems. In this paper, we conceptually develop dynamic and recursive relationships between innovation ecosystems, cross-sector partnerships as herding spaces, and places that include the natural and regional environments. We demonstrate these dynamic relationships in the illustrative case of an emerging circular textile ecosystem in Southwest Finland, which was developed and nurtured by a cross-sector partnership. Drawing on our literature review and showcasing this illustrative case, we introduce a conceptual model and discuss how place can play an enabling or disabling role in the development of sustainable innovation ecosystems, and that the recursive relationships can be best understood with the creation of vicious and virtuous cycles. We emphasise the role of path dependence in the relationship between ecosystems and the places they are embedded, and in doing so we bridge the gap between innovation ecosystems and natural and regional environments. We position nature and regions as platial scales and highlight the crucial role of cross-sector partnerships as herding spaces to develop and nurture the sustainable innovation ecosystems that help the regeneration of places.

Keywords: *innovation ecosystems, cross-sector partnerships, circular economy, place, space*

Introduction

Why do some innovation ecosystems flourish in certain places, and even with incentives it is not possible to generate similar ecosystems in others? How can we explain the

success of some cross-sector partnerships (CSPs) that manage to regenerate their natural and regional environments, when seemingly identical partnerships fail to do so in other places? And what makes the role of CSPs different than other partnerships (e.g. inter-firm alliances) when it comes to developing and nurturing sustainable innovation ecosystems? These questions have led scholars to increasingly engage with explanations about places (Ryan, Branzei, Geiger, & Haugh, 2019; Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013), and spaces (Spicer, 2006; Stephenson, Kuismin, Putnam, & Sivunen, 2020; Taylor & Spicer, 2007) in various organisational settings. Scholars have investigated the impact of place-embeddedness in emerging ecosystems (Audretsch & Lehmann, 2017; Autio, Nambisan, Thomas, & Wright, 2018; Muñoz, Kibler, Mandakovic, & Amorós, 2020), governance of common-pool resources (Bowen, Bansal, & Slawinski, 2018; Cantino, Devalle, Cortese, Ricciardi, & Longo, 2017), and different forms of collaborative governance (Clarke, 2016). In a similar vein, scholars have demonstrated how partnerships can create a space for negotiating issues for different societal stakeholders (Ometto, Gegenhuber, Winter, & Greenwood, 2019; Ungureanu, Cochis, Bertolotti, Mattarelli, & Scapolan, 2020; vanTulder & Pfisterer, 2013), which can lead to the development of sustainable innovation ecosystems (DiVito & Ingen-Housz, 2017; Parida, Burstrom, Visnjic, & Wincent, 2019; Rajala, Hakanen, Mattila, Seppälä, & Westerlund, 2018). As an emerging domain, however, the links between place, CSPs and ecosystems still remain disparate, even though highly relevant.

Motivated by these platial and spatial aspects of organising in ecosystems and partnerships, in this paper, we ask: “What are the dynamics of place in cross-sector partnerships and ecosystems?” We position our study to provide an answer to this question. Based on a review of the literature on spaces and places, ecosystems, with a focus on innovation ecosystems, and CSPs, we develop a conceptual model that brings these seemingly disparate concepts together. This model demonstrates the recursive and path-

dependent relationships between CSPs as spaces, innovation ecosystems, and places of different scales (regional and natural environment). To support our conceptual model, we draw on the supporting evidence from an illustrative case of circular innovation ecosystems in the context of textiles in Finland.

The most important relationship we conceptually build is between innovation ecosystems and places. By developing this relationship, we draw the boundaries of ecosystems, link them with the notion of place and tie innovation ecosystems to natural and regional environments. Doing so, we contribute to the literature on innovation ecosystems by putting innovation ecosystems in their places and, most importantly, bring ecosystems back to their ecological roots, hence answering the call of ecosystem scholars (Ritala & Almpantopoulou, 2017). We explain how places can be regenerated or destroyed by the very actors of an innovation ecosystem who are embedded in these places. In other words, the fate of places is not independent of the actors, whose meaning-making systems are dependent on their places. Our illustrative case shows a virtuous cycle in which place, and ecosystem actors' place attachment, can further help to regenerate both the regional and natural environment. However, we discuss that places may also restrict and demotivate actors, especially in places where actors are likely to be disconnected from their local environments and experiencing a sense of placelessness (Fathallah, Branzei, & Schaan, 2018).

The second relationship we build is between CSPs and innovation ecosystems. The extant literature has already discussed the importance of cooperative dynamics in inter-firm alliances within an innovation ecosystem (Ansari, Garud, & Kumaraswamy, 2016; Shipilov & Gawer, 2020). However, even though the development of innovation ecosystems is highly dependent on the coordination of actors from various societal sectors, the role of CSPs has not been an explicit focus of this literature. We posit the role of CSPs as herding spaces in

which different institutional actors interact to develop, nurture, and ensure the health of an innovation ecosystem which is dependent on the platial dynamics.

The third relationship is between CSPs and place. Here we also emphasise that places provide a formation rationale to CSPs and explain how CSPs can provide the space for actors to engage in place-making activities. Doing so, we emphasise the recursivity of the place-ecosystem-partnership relationship dynamics and highlight that actors may, depending on their connectedness to their places, engage in making or destructing their places through virtuous or vicious cycles.

The remainder of this paper is as follows. In Theoretical Background, we provide a brief review of the literature: spaces and places; innovation ecosystems; and CSPs. In the following section, we provide the background of the illustrative case: the circular textile ecosystems in Southwest Finland. Following that, we introduce the conceptual model we developed that demonstrates the recursive relationships between places, partnerships and ecosystems. Next, we discuss the implications of these recursive relationships in triggering virtuous and vicious cycles. Finally, we conclude by summarising our contributions and providing guidance for future research.

Theoretical Background

Space & Place

Space and place have different meanings yet require each other for definition. Tuan (1977: 6) emphasises that "space is more abstract than place" and adds that "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value". Tuan highlights that while places are associated with the feelings of security and stability, like how our homes feel, spaces may trigger senses of openness and freedom or threat and control.

In a similar vein, Gieryn (2000: 465) defines place as "space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations". To add further, Sorenson and Baum (2003: 10) highlight that while "theories of place attribute behaviours and performance differences [at firms] to characteristics of a particular region...; theories of space [are about] the dispersion of activities within a firm or industry". Hence, places contain uniquely sentimental, cultural, value-based meanings of a location (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). Spaces, on the other hand, can be areas, networks, clusters or platforms whereby various actors may interact, and may only become value-laden, and turn into place, as a result of such interactions (Sorenson & Baum, 2003).

Space

The research on spaces has been fragmented since researchers have often described different kinds of spaces that allow room for interaction within and across organisations. "Ba", for instance, has been proposed as a space within organisations that allows knowledge creation and innovation by providing organisational actors with the room for sharing knowledge (Nonaka & Konno, 1998). Others have proposed "spaces of negotiation" as the "arenas of interaction that allow members of each group to discuss the trade-offs that they face" (Battilana, Sengul, Pache, & Model, 2015: 1658); or "relational spaces" as "areas of isolation, interaction, and inclusion that allow middle-manager reformers and subordinate employees to develop a cross-position collective for change" (Kellogg, 2009: 657). Still, others refer to "respected spaces" where the distance between different actors of a community can enable collaboration by leaving room for feelings of safety (De La Chaux, Haugh, & Greenwood, 2018). Generally, these spaces describe a sense of proximity or distance to enable cross-functional or cross-community interactions within organisations (De Vaujany & Vaast, 2014).

Scholars have also described various types of inter-organisational spaces: interstitial spaces (Furnari, 2014), collaborative spaces (Ungureanu et al., 2020), partnering spaces (vanTulder & Pfisterer, 2013), and herding spaces (Ometto et al., 2019). Whilst the terms scholars used to describe these spaces may differ, these inter-organisational spaces have similar features. They all allow members of different organisations to get out of their organisational contexts. Hence, they create a distance between a member and their focal organisation, even if this distance is temporary (Furnari, 2014). These spaces also bring these members to proximity with other societal stakeholders, whether they are clients, suppliers, or consumers (Ungureanu et al., 2020) or the public, non-profit and private actors in a cross-sectoral setting (vanTulder & Pfisterer, 2013).

These spaces, indeed, contain the material elements of artefacts such as walls, doors, and layout, as highlighted in the organisational spaces (De Vaujany & Vaast, 2014). At the same time, they provide the room for the social and symbolic elements of collective meaning-making as they allow different actors to jointly identify complex issues, as well as opportunities to complement each other with different capabilities and resources (Ungureanu et al., 2020). This interactive process helps actors to address the potential tensions between various societal stakeholders as shared interpretations and novel practices tend to emerge (Furnari, 2014; Le Ber & Branzei, 2011; Ometto et al., 2019). For instance, scholars found that a shared vision, standards and enabling regulations can all help the creation of spaces that play the role of a common playing field – a space where everybody who wishes to contribute to or facilitate the sustainable energy transition, can (Planko, Chappin, Cramer, & Hekkert, 2019).

In the remainder of this article we join Ometto et al. (2019) and focus on such inter-organisational spaces, referring to them as herding spaces. We choose this term because it captures the act of bringing different actors together and highlights the movement of these

actors in a herd, and hence acknowledges the dynamic nature of spaces (Stephenson et al., 2020). It also recognises the role of power and the importance of coordination in spaces, as actors are being herded by more influential members that may be viewed as leaders or orchestrators.

Place

While the scholarly conversation on spaces is more mature in the management and organisation domain, places have been largely ignored (Lawrence & Dover, 2015). Places are defined as "material and social space[s], a habitus, infused with meanings and transected by relations through which particular cultural capitals are formed and transformed" (Healey, 1999: 112). Not only do places contain the actors through actors' embeddedness and situatedness, they actively shape actors by providing exclusive meanings and identities (Lawrence & Dover, 2015; Marsden, 2012) and ecological values (Brown, Reed, & Harris, 2002; Norton & Hannon, 1997; van Hille, de Bakker, Groenewegen, & Ferguson, 2019). Hence, actors develop a place-based identity (Stedman, 2002) and a unique attachment to places (Kibler, Fink, Lang, & Muñoz, 2015), which also shapes their connectedness to the natural environment (Basu, Hashimoto, & Dasgupta, 2019). In sum, places not only contain a geographic location with a specific landscape but also provide unique meaning systems (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). They both shape, and are shaped by, the actors embedded in them (Healey, 1999).

When studying places, an important factor is their scale (Bowen et al., 2018), defined as a "graduated series, usually, a nested hierarchy of bundled spaces of different sizes" (Spicer, 2006: 1470), such as local, regional, national and global (Bowen et al., 2018; Cuba & Hummon, 1993; Spicer, 2006). Most place-based studies consider regions and cities as providing residents with a unique identity (Till, 2012; Vallance, Tewdwr-Jones, & Kempton, 2019). Other scales, however, include organisational scale (Guthey, Whiteman, &

Elmes, 2014; Walck, 1996), natural ecological environments (Crane, Matten, & Moon, 2008; Driscoll & Starik, 2004), forests and parks (Brown et al., 2002), neighbourhoods, communities and villages, and circles and households (Steyaert & Katz, 2004).

In this paper, our focus is on the natural ecological and regional environments as scales of places. Choosing these scales, we aim to link innovation ecosystems to the regional and natural ecologies in which they are embedded.

Ecosystems

The ecosystem metaphor is borrowed from the natural ecology where they are defined as "the interacting system made up of all the living and non-living objects in a specified volume of space" and considered as the basic unit of nature on Earth (Weathers, Strayer, & Likens, 2012: 3). The metaphor was first introduced into sociology to study human ecology by Hawley (1944). However, after the early years that ecosystems gained traction within sociology, Hawley identified issues with the misuse of the term and highlighted that scholars fail to "maintain a close working relationship between human ecology and general or bioecology". He critiqued the over-emphasised treatment of "competition" as a central process that explains ecosystems (Hawley, 1944: 399) and also problematised the assumption of 'growth', arguing that "other things being constant, [an ecosystem] contains its own limits to growth and those limiting conditions come into operation independent of the composition of the biophysical environment" (Hawley, 1986: 54). Following sociology, the ecosystem concept was introduced into business (Iansiti & Levien, 2004; Moore, 1993), innovation (Adner, 2006) and entrepreneurship studies (Isenberg, 2010). Interestingly, however, also within these domains, a similar critique to that of Hawley has been put forward by others (Audretsch, 2019; Ritala & Almpnanopoulou, 2017). We offer the notion of place and space to resolve the debate in this area and expand further on innovation ecosystems which are the focus of our conceptualisation.

Innovation Ecosystems

Joining Granstrand and Holgersson (2020: 102098), we use the term innovation ecosystems to refer to "the evolving set of actors, activities, and artefacts, and the institutions and relations, including complementary and substitute relations, that are important for the innovative performance of an actor or a population of actors". Generally, innovation ecosystems consist of both upstream suppliers and downstream buyers (Adner & Kapoor, 2010), as well as other institutional actors that include entrepreneurs, established firms (incumbents), suppliers, competitors, consumers, policymakers, universities, financial players (Aarikka-Stenroos & Ritala, 2017; Valkokari, 2015; Valkokari, Seppänen, Mäntylä, & Jylhä-Ollila, 2017). There are hierarchical relationships between various ecosystem actors whose roles may be related either directly or in support of the value creation (Dedehayir, Matthews, Mohannak, & Pennetta, 2015).

As implied in the roles of ecosystem actors, innovation ecosystems have an important function: the co-creation and co-capture of value (Meynhardt, Chandler, & Strathoff, 2016; Yin, Ming, & Zhang, 2020). To fulfil this function requires the flow of materials, resources, capabilities, and knowledge between the interdependent actors of an ecosystem (Ganco, Kapoor, & Lee, 2019). Co-creation and co-capture of value are much emphasised, because the survival of organisations does not solely depend on the individual performance of actors, but also to the properties of the ecosystem that they are a part of (D'Souza, Wortmann, Huitema, & Velthuisen, 2015; Kapoor, 2018), highlighting the "shared fate of the community as a whole" (Jacobides, Cennamo, & Gawer, 2018: 2257). Here, value is often considered as an economic value that private actors generate. However, some scholars problematised this economic emphasis and highlighted how some ecosystems are specifically created or emerge to generate environmental and social value (DiVito & Ingen-Housz, 2017;

Kapsalis, Kyriakopoulos, & Aravossis, 2019; Parida et al., 2019) or public value (Meynhardt et al., 2016).

Innovation Ecosystems in Places

Even though it has not been studied explicitly, scholars implicitly acknowledged the embeddedness of innovation ecosystems in places and focused on different scales such as countries (Isenberg, 2010; Svensson, Udesen, & Webb, 2019), regions (Spigel, 2017; Spigel & Harrison, 2018), cities (Chesbrough, Kim, & Agogino, 2014; DiVito & Ingen-Housz, 2017), and other localities (Bahrami & Evans, 1995). Places define the locality and draw the boundaries of an ecosystem (Audretsch & Lehmann, 2017; Muñoz et al., 2020), be it smaller and local (Kwak, Kim, & Park, 2018) or global (Madsen, 2020). Therefore, place-based embeddedness emphasises how innovation ecosystems are a part of ecological, biophysical and geographical systems that surround them (Vermunt, Negro, Van Laerhoven, Verweij, & Hekkert, 2020). This means that "each region has different ecological challenges and solutions, different networks of local actors and collaborations present, and specific local institutional settings"; hence solutions too must be altered according to the needs of the local settings (Vermunt et al., 2020: 246).

In this article, we conceptually develop this relationship between innovation ecosystems and places (natural and regional) further. Additionally, we integrate the link between innovation ecosystems and partnerships.

Partnerships in Innovation Ecosystems

Actors co-evolve with their ecosystems (Galateanu & Avasilcai, 2016; Lindgren, Eriksson, & Lyytinen, 2015). As the ecosystem evolves, so do the roles of actors and their strategies (Hannah & Eisenhardt, 2018), and of course, their relationships with each other (Ansari et al., 2016; Chesbrough et al., 2014). The extant ecosystem literature has often

focused on inter-firm alliances that were cooperative in nature (Adner & Kapoor, 2010; Shipilov & Gawer, 2020). Ansari et al. (2016), for instance, highlighted how disruptors need to cooperate with incumbents that may otherwise resist their innovations. It is, therefore, highlighted that actors form alliance portfolios with other ecosystem actors to balance cooperative tensions (Kauppila, 2010) and co-create value (Ozcan & Eisenhardt, 2009; Stonig & Müller-Stewens, 2019).

Aarikka-Stenroos and Ritala (2017: 30), on the other hand, highlighted that an understanding of wider collaborations, other than that of inter-firm, is necessary since "institutions, regulators, users, and other actors that have more distant, yet crucial, impacts on an organisation's potential success and survival". However, the attention to the specific role of such wider collaborations, as in the case of CSPs in innovation ecosystems is limited (Grobbelaar, 2018; Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016; Oskam, Bossink, & de Man, 2020; Rajala et al., 2018).

Cross-sector Partnerships (CSPs)

CSPs are "collaborative efforts across two or more sectors that search for more effective organisational approaches to solve complex social problems" (Vurro, Dacin, & Perrini, 2011: 39). They consist of relations between public-non-profit, public-private, private-non-profit actors and tripartite partnerships whereby all three societal actors get together (Kolk, 2014; Selsky & Parker, 2005, 2010). The rationale behind CSPs is the assumption that a single organisation would fall short of addressing the systemic and wicked challenges (Ryan, Millar, Mitchell, & Daskou, 2012); therefore CSPs are viewed as ways in which actors can create systemic change through collective action (Senge, Lichtenstein, Kaeufer, Bradbury, & Carroll, 2007).

CSPs provide a platform for organisations to pool different resources from each other, manage multiple flows of resources across (Montgomery, Dacin, & Dacin, 2012; Vurro et al.,

2011), co-create new and sustainable capabilities by allowing room for learning (Arya & Salk, 2006; Dentoni, Bitzer, & Pascucci, 2015), legitimise sustainable actors, technologies and their products and services (Baur & Palazzo, 2015; Dacin, Oliver, & Roy, 2007), and develop collaborative and sustainable business models (Oskam et al., 2020).

Cross-sector Partnerships and Innovation Ecosystems

We argue that CSPs would play an important role in generating and nurturing sustainable innovation ecosystems and help ecosystem actors to utilise the relationships to create shared value and positive societal change (Kramer & Pfitzer, 2016). Indeed, Rajala et al. (2018: 29) highlight that partnerships can help to structure a circular innovation ecosystem, especially by organising the flow of waste which can be coordinated between actors from different sectors. Grobbelaar (2018), on the other hand, explains how a university led CSP helped to develop and nurture a local innovation system in South Africa and facilitated mutual and shared value creation amongst different regional stakeholders. While Grobbelaar (2018) emphasised the community benefits of CSPs, CSPs are also promoted as effective mechanisms to support the governance of natural ecosystems (Heuer, 2011; Manring, 2007), whether it be climate change adaptation (Xu & Grumbine, 2014), or fisheries management (Berghöfer, Wittmer, & Rauschmayer, 2008). Overall, these studies demonstrate how CSPs carry the potential of bridging between innovation and natural ecosystems by providing a space for actors to interact and address ecological and moral issues of a place. Herein, we position CSPs role in innovation ecosystems as herding spaces (Ometto et al., 2019) and expand on this idea further.

Illustrative Case

In this paper, we aim to make a theoretical contribution by conceptually developing the dynamic and recursive relationships between places, ecosystems and CSPs as herding spaces. To do so, we followed an analytical process. First, we introduced reviews of literature

in the previous Theoretical Background section about: spaces and places, with an emphasis on what implications they may have in the context of partnerships and ecosystems; innovation ecosystems with an emphasis on the role of place; and the role of CSPs with a focus on their role in developing and nurturing innovation ecosystems. These reviews helped us to bridge between the closely related but disparate concepts and build a conceptual model that is presented in the following Theorising section.

To strengthen the explanatory power of our model we use an illustrative case like other studies in this domain (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Schouten, 2018; Stadtler, 2016). Illustrative cases are helpful to describe "how particular concepts operate in a particular setting" (Lê & Schmid, 2019: 125). This illustrative case helped us to explain the connections between these concepts better. Therefore, we find it essential to emphasise that, as opposed to case studies that are used to develop, extend or test theories, our case herein helps only to exemplify and showcase our conceptual model. What follows is the background of this illustrative case, which is a CSP formed in Southwest Finland to develop and nurture a sustainable innovation ecosystem for circular textiles. To set this exemplary case, we benefited from studies about Southwest Finland that provided a geographic, cultural and sociological background of the place (N=14) and reports, strategy documents, and press releases about the circular textile ecosystem and the partnership in Southwest Finland (N=26).

Place: Regional and Natural Environment in Southwest Finland

Southwest Finland is situated by the coast of the Archipelago Sea and known for its unique archipelago comprising over 20,000 islands (The Regional Strategy for Southwest Finland, 2020). By population, Southwest Finland is the third biggest region in Finland. The regional authorities set the region's vision as "the quality of life is at its best" and add that "the successful and prosperous region is built through cooperation and partnership" (The Regional Strategy for Southwest Finland, 2020).

This region can be considered as "the historic core of the nation as [it] served as the bridgehead of Swedish authority from the thirteenth century, later as the academic source of nation-building and is today the Lutheran centre of Finland" (Vainikka, 2015). The region's historical importance also comes from the city Turku which previously served as the capital of Finland. Hence the Finnish name of the region being 'Varsinais-Suomi', which directly translates to 'Finland Proper'. Therefore, it would be fair to argue that amongst other areas, this region portrays a strong regionalist and place-based identity. Remarkably, the "the central city of Turku populates regional identity narratives as a more tangible and locatable praxis of identity" [whereby] identification with municipalities is both an emotional attachment and economic rationality" (Vainikka, 2015: 528). Also referred to as the Turku region, Southwest Finland is also known as a student-friendly region due to the presence of universities that provide a youthful and innovative identity to the area.

Like other regions in Finland, forests play an essential role in the daily lives of the communities in the Southwest, and have traditionally been protected and conserved through various regional policies (Sironen, Primmer, Leskinen, Similä, & Punttila, 2020). Beyond, animal geography and wildlife have also been critical in Finnish environmental policies, and communities have long described shared and non-shared spaces with wildlife (Ojalammi & Blomley, 2015). This connectedness to nature is further reinforced with the archipelago and the impact of geography on the local community's place attachment, as studies demonstrate that people from the region consider "nature and environment as important matters in their relationship with their home area" (Siivonen, 2009: 54). In line with this strong regional identity attached to the preservation of nature, the regional strategy also focuses heavily on sustainability and circular economy.

Innovation Ecosystem

The emerging circular textile ecosystem spanned several vital industries and sectors, as shown in Figure 1 (Pohls, 2020). In this ecosystem, the most prominent actors were incumbents and sustainable entrepreneurs from within the textiles and fashion industries. While their involvement in a circular textile ecosystem would be expected, another rather unexpected industry was also involved in the ecosystem: the forest industry, which is one of the largest industries in Finland (Pohls, 2020). Several players in the forest industry have been working on developing sustainable technologies to create cellulosic fibres out of forest or cardboard feedstock. Other notable industries included clothing retailers and end-users of recycled textile material, such as furniture manufacturers. There were also several key players from outside the private sector, including research organisations, regional universities, the local authorities from the city of Turku and the regional waste management companies. While many of the critical activities in the innovation ecosystem took place in Southwest Finland, some of the large firms involved in the ecosystem operated in multiple localities across Finland.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The emergence of the circular textile ecosystem could be explained by the proactive engagement of the private sector and the enabling conditions driven by national and regional policies. Historically, the textile industry was strong in Finland until the 1980s, after which much of the production was outsourced to low-cost countries with the trends of globalisation and fast fashion in textiles (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017). This led to a considerable downsizing

of the industry and shrinking visibility of Finnish fashion brands in the global markets. In recent years, to turn this industry around and back to Finland, there have been strong policy incentives that viewed sustainable and circular fashion as essential opportunities both for businesses and for regional development (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017). Combined with the EU directive on textile waste which mandates all member states to organise a separate collection for textile waste by 2025, Finnish waste plan announced in 2018 and Finnish plastic roadmap in 2019, like many other countries in the EU (DiVito & Ingen-Housz, 2017; Salo, Suikkanen, & Nissinen, 2019), a circular textile ecosystem has also been emerging in Finland; especially around the Southwest region (Heikkilä, Cura, Heikkilä, Hinkka, Ikonen, Kamppuri et al., 2019).

Cross-Sector Partnership: Telaketju Tekes

In Finland, approximately 100 thousand tons of textile waste is generated annually, of which about 80% ends up being incinerated, and only around 15% is reused (Mandalia, 2020). It was against this background and the enabling policy conditions that Telaketju was formed as a multi-stakeholder CSP in 2017 (Heikkilä et al., 2019).

The objective of the partnership was to eliminate textile waste going to landfill or incineration and instead close the loop by building a network to collect, sort and utilise post-consumer textile waste, introduce initiatives for reuse, and develop new technologies and to create recycled fibres from this waste; thereby, create ecological value. The partnership consisted of different pilot projects to experiment regional textile waste management co-funded by the Ministry of Environment, and R&D activities for textiles recycling funded by Tekes – the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation (Heikkilä et al., 2019). Telaketju Tekes was “led by Turku University of Applied Sciences (TUAS) and Southwest Finland Waste Management Ltd in collaboration with SITRA (the Finnish Innovation Fund), the City of Turku, Tekes (the Finnish Funding Agency for Innovation), a Nordic circular economy company Ekokem and

the Finnish Solid Waste Association” (Nordregio, 2020). The partnership soon grew into a multi-stakeholder network with other organisations joining (see Figure 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

The partners stated that "the main expected outcome of the Telaketju Tekes project was to build an ecosystem composed of companies and other organisations who have the necessary knowledge and urge to higher sustainability and to increase textile recycling in Finland" (Heikkila et al., 2019). Interestingly, therefore, the CSP not only facilitated the already existing relationships between ecosystem actors but also created the space to strengthen those relationships, build trust between actors from different industries and create and maintain a healthy innovation ecosystem.

It is fair to say that this partnership was successful in achieving the outcomes set out by the partners. Recently, some partners announced the development of a new textile recycling plant which aims to remove 12000 tonnes of textile waste annually, located in Paimio within Southwest Finland which will start operating in 2021. Thanks to the space created by the partnership, the partners developed a waste collection network nation-wide and aim to scale the project until 2022 to increase the amount of waste recycled. The plant will regenerate fibres from recycled textile waste, which can be used for “various industrial applications, including yarn and fabric, insulating materials for construction and shipping industries, acoustic panels, composites, non-woven and filter materials, and other technical textiles, such as geo-textiles” (Association for Finnish Work, 2020).

Theorising Ecosystems in Places and Partnerships as Herding Spaces: Developing a Conceptual Model

Guided by the literature review, we introduce a conceptual model, as shown in Figure 3. This model demonstrates the dynamic and recursive relationships between place, CSPs and innovation ecosystems. In this section, we showcase the implications of these relationships in our illustrative case.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Ecosystems in Places: The Recursive Dynamics between Places and Ecosystems (1a&b)

Both organisations (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013) and ecosystems (Muñoz et al., 2020; Spigel & Harrison, 2018) vary in their degrees of rootedness in place. This impacts the extent to which they would regenerate the places of which they are embedded. These bonds ecosystem actors have with the place are not independent of the characteristics of the regional and natural ecological environment. The place provides the local resources to the actors in the ecosystem (Korsgaard, Ferguson, & Gaddefors, 2015), identities (Stedman, 2002), and institutions (Lang, Fink, & Kibler, 2013), and hence provides them with opportunities for innovation (Audretsch, 2019; Audretsch & Lehmann, 2017; O'Connor, Stam, Sussan, & Audretsch, 2018). For example, being close to 'sacrosanct' green landscape would have a positive impact on firms' development of voluntary environmental practices as it provides greater access to environmental knowledge (DeBoer, Panwar, & Rivera, 2017), as well as creating a stronger sense of place and a motivation to protect the natural environment (Kaltenborn, 1997; Petrova, Čihař, & Bouzarovski, 2011).

In the case of the circular textile ecosystem in Southwest Finland, the proximity to the natural environment (e.g. forests and islands) can be seen as a contributor to high environmental values (Siivonen, 2009). This, in turn, contributed to the formation of an ecosystem that promoted textile waste management as a solution to environmental issues and provided legitimacy to the ecosystem. On the other hand, the long history of the forest industry in Finland, which developed due to the vast boreal forests in the country, is likely to have contributed to seeing forest-based feedstock as a potentially more sustainable alternative to cotton. The regional environment, in turn, provided an anchor for the ecosystem, as the local waste management organisation has developed new textile recycling practices since 2017 (Telekatju, 2018). For example, the location for the recycling plant was selected as it provided “key transport connections and at a good distance from the Port of Turku” (Mandalia, 2020). However, the existing regional sustainability strategies, the web of relations between universities and local authorities and the regional identity all affected this ecosystem and enabled it to flourish in the Southwest. Given that the new plant is also located in this region, it will further reinforce the green face of the region and provide “Southwest Finland a unique opportunity to be at the forefront in creating a completely new line of business involving products made from recycled textiles” (Nordregio, 2020).

Innovation ecosystems also actively shape the places they inhabit, impacting both the natural and the regional environment. They do so through "social-discursive practices that create, govern, and transform places" and hence "try to shape, contest, and/or otherwise govern" places (Williams, 2014: 75). In such ecosystems, it may be possible that actors have conflicting frames which would lead to frame contests (Marsden, 2012). As a result of these contests, in sustainability-driven ecosystems, it is possible to expect that actors would develop strategies to create positive environmental value and regenerate the region at the

same time (Di Gregorio, 2017; Gaddefors & Anderson, 2018; Guthey et al., 2014; Slawinski, Winsor, Mazutis, Schouten, & Smith, 2019; Zucchella & Previtali, 2019).

In our illustrative case, the natural environment benefits from the innovation ecosystem as textile materials are diverted from landfills or incineration to material reuse and recycle. The regional environment benefits from the ecosystems as the new textile recycling plant is planned to become an anchor point for the modern textile industry (and other textile feedstock utilisers) in the future, and thus increases employment and the economic development of the region further. While currently the recycling plant employs about 20 people, the partners estimate that the scaling up of the project would soon lead to the employment of up to 300 people in the region (VTT, 2019). The ecosystem has also helped to reiterate the green identity of the area and turned it into a strategic advantage, hence the recursivity of these relationships.

Cross-Sector Partnerships in Places: The Recursive Dynamics between Places and Partnerships (2a & b)

Places also provide specific resources, opportunities and identities for the actors involved in a CSP. Most importantly, places provide a particular motivation for the formation of a CSP, to answer the needs of a community in a specific location (Zuckerman, 2019), whether it be coral reef protection (Bloomfield & Schleifer, 2017), promoting social inclusion (McDonald, Frost, Kirk-Brown, Rainnie, & Van Dijk, 2010), encouraging sustainable cotton farming (Bitzer & Glasbergen, 2010), reducing race-based discrimination (Ferdinand, Paradies, & Kelaher, 2013) or revitalisation of plantations (van Hille et al., 2019). Hence, places provide CSPs with a formation motivation rationale (Feilhauer & Hahn, 2019), which is to do with the embeddedness of issues in specific locations.

In our illustrative case, the natural environment provided specific inputs to the formation of the CSP. As with the relationship between the ecosystem and the natural

environment, the availability of forest-based materials in the natural environment had a critical impact on the partnership. The partnership focused further on developing the cellulosic fibres, which have been the most promising technologies to replace materials that are known for their negative environmental impacts, such as cotton due to water use or fossil-fuel-based synthetic fibres due to micro-plastics. It is possible to argue that nature has become a resource as well as an inspiration for new technologies.

Furthermore, the regional environment has been an essential catalyst for the partnership. For instance, Pekka Sundman from the City of Turku highlighted that the “Turku region holds a significant amount of expertise in the circular economy, and [they] need[ed] to utilise that know-how together” by designing “a roadmap in broad collaboration” (City of Turku, 2020). The regional identity tied closely with nature (Sironen et al., 2020), and therefore to sustainability and circular economy, combined with the innovative spirit from local actors was a significant antecedent of the partnership (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017). Indeed, Outi Luukko, the chairperson of the new recycling plant, Rester, suggested that “the most important partner in collection and sorting [has been] the consortium of municipalities in Southwest Finland, which takes responsibility for the treatment of waste textiles collected from consumers” (Mandalia, 2020). This would not have been possible without the participation of citizens and communities across Southwest Finland (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017).

While places motivate the actors to form CSPs that tackle local environmental or social issues, CSPs also shape places, as ecosystems do. For example, Slawinski et al. (2019) give the example of a partnership between Canada's National Film Board and Memorial University of Newfoundland. This particular partnership, using documentaries that showed the change of the Fogo Island, motivated the local communities to "forge a common future path" by enhancing their sense of place. van Hille et al. (2019) similarly talks about how

partnerships that strategise nature and conditions set by the natural environment (i.e. temporalities of plant life cycles) also have an impact on the regeneration of ecological and regional settings.

In our illustrative case, CSP had an impact on the natural environment by enabling participants to learn new ways of utilising textile waste, reducing CO₂ emissions, and contributing with a solution to the concerns around raw material security and availability as textile waste can replace virgin fibres (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017). The CSP shaped the regional environment by transmitting new knowledge to actors in the region through the new cross-industrial relations. For instance, a start-up – Infinited Fiber Company – which is also a spin-off from VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland Ltd, Aalto University and a partner of Telaketju, developed a technology that transforms textile waste into fashion from recycled fibres. This start-up, thanks to the partnership, was able to access the local waste collection network and understand the complexities of the supply side (Mandalia, 2020).

Cross-Sector Partnerships as Herding Spaces for Ecosystems: The Recursive Dynamics (3a&b)

CSPs are formed to address not only place-based issues but also to ensure the health of innovation ecosystems (Grobbelaar, 2018) which is a partnership motivation rationale in itself. Such CSPs often occur between parties who have already worked before or at least have some knowledge about each other (Le Ber & Branzei, 2011). Therefore, ecosystems provide the already existing formal and informal networks, the pre-existing web of relationships between various ecosystem actors (Burchell & Cook, 2013; Mitsuhashi, 2003).

In our illustrative case, the innovation ecosystem included actors from the pre-existing textile network in the country, but the CSP also brought in new actors. These new actors included regional and municipal waste management companies who were mandated to collect the textile waste in their constituent regions, consultancies that aimed to foster circular

business, research institutes that aimed to develop new materials through innovative recycling technologies (such as Ioncell), entrepreneurs who built circular business models but lacked access to the broader institutional context, and the traditional Finnish forest industry which was seeking novel ways to increase value added using forest-based feedstock (Fontell & Heikkilä, 2017). Therefore, whilst the pre-existing relationships amongst the actors of the ecosystem facilitated the formation of the partnership in the first place, the partnership platform also facilitated the construction of new ties in the innovation ecosystem by bringing these different actors together. Hence, the CSP was followed by other inter-firm alliances between the private actors. For instance, recently, two large firms that were also participants of the partnership, Fortum (energy and waste management) and Metsä (the forest industry) launched a strategic R&D partnership to develop new technologies and solutions to convert organic feedstocks into high-value bioproducts such as textile fibres (Fortum, 2020).

CSPs provide herding spaces that connect the institutional context, place and various ecosystem actors (Ometto et al., 2019), allow them room for interaction (Battilana et al., 2015), and negotiation for different and conflicting place-based frames (Marsden, 2012). Even though embeddedness in a specific geographic location makes it more likely to share particular belief systems, culture and cognition (Addy & Dubé, 2018; Hansen, 2014), CSPs are often guided by differing institutional logics (Ahmadsimab & Chowdhury, 2019; Hesse, Kreutzer, & Diehl, 2018; Saz-Carranza & Longo, 2012; Vurro et al., 2011). The differences in logics would impact how they view place-based issues. CSPs provide the ecosystem actors with a space of gathering in which different views can be combined (Le Ber & Branzei, 2011) or a pluralistic understanding and consensus can be maintained (Klitsie, Ansari, & Volberda, 2018).

In our illustrative case, the CSP has played a role as a herding space within the innovation ecosystem by shifting the way ecosystem actors think, reconfiguring the actor

networks in the area and bringing new actors into the region. One of the members of the ecosystem, Mika Ingi, managing director for Paimion Kehityks Oy, a regional municipal actor, highlighted that, “they wanted to step out of [their] traditional municipal role and create significant added value for everyone taking part”, and that is why “[they] are involved in the development of a new modern service model based on ecosystem thinking”. This shows that the CSP was able to create that space of negotiation which led to the emergence of a circular ecosystem thinking as a shared frame across the actors.

Discussion

In the previous section, drawing on our illustrative case and the accumulated knowledge on the relationships between ecosystems, partnerships and place, we built a conceptual model that shows recursive and dynamic relationships. Herein, we further problematise and discuss the recursive nature of these relationships.

First, our illustrative case has shown how an innovation ecosystem, through the herding space created by a CSP, engaged in place-making activities that have produced positive environmental value and regeneration of an industry in a region. Herein, the place has played an enabling role for the ecosystem actors. However, we must highlight that the role of place would not be enabling in all ecosystems – in some cases, places may restrict actors (O’Connor et al., 2018). Indeed, the same place that provides resources to the ecosystem can also be the bottleneck (Hannah, 2015). In such places, actors may experience lower degrees of attachment to place, and they would be less likely to perceive or recognise the local needs (McKeever, Jack, & Anderson, 2015). This situation may even lead private actors with no other choice than to leave the very regions they could have helped to regenerate (Fathallah et al., 2018). It is for this reason that, in post-conflict settings, recent studies have put greater emphasis in actors such as universities to develop and nurture ecosystems (Nkusi, Cunningham, Nyuur, & Pattinson, 2020). In such contexts, some actors

may even engage in exploitative activities and further destroy the very places they are a part of (Shrivastava & Kennelly, 2013). In some ecosystems that are virtual or digital, an ecosystem may be place-neutral whereby place may not be a bottleneck but also would not provide any value either.

The dependence between actors and places leads to restorative topophilia – the love of place (Tuan, 1990) – which "represents an opportunity for positive dependence that underpins the emergence of virtuous cycle" (Tidball & Stedman, 2013: 297). We identified in our case that the strong regional identity of Southwest Finland, associated with the history and tied firmly to the natural environment, led to such restorative topophilia. Yet, a negative dependence would have led to vicious cycles which would be hard for the actors to break away. To break away, "when a place is damaged or broken", actors consciously need to take action with various "practices that help to tip these [socio-ecological] systems from vicious to virtuous modes" (Tidball, Metcalf, Bain, & Elmqvist, 2018: 800).

Through the same lens, it is also crucial to problematise the notion of 'ecosystem growth'. The literature on ecosystems often treats ecosystem growth in monetary or market terms, assuming that healthy ecosystems are those that grow and expand as in the famous case of Silicon Valley (Audretsch, 2019). Furthermore, growth is treated as a necessity and ecosystems are born, grow, get mature and die unless actors actively engage in renewing the ecosystem (Cantner, Cunningham, Lehmann, & Menter, 2020). Such a view does not consider how an overshoot in the socio-ecological systems would negatively affect the growth of ecosystems, nor does it shed light on how healthy ecosystems can create positive dependencies and virtuous cycles.

In reality, there are limits to growth, and such limitations are sometimes due to the cognition and belief systems of actors in an ecosystem (Haugh, 2019), or sometimes set by

the natural ecological or regional environment (Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2004). In the Finnish textile ecosystem, the limit to the growth of the innovation ecosystem is partly set by the amount of textile waste generated in Finland and neighbouring countries. However, as a part of a circular transition, it is important also to focus on the reduction of consumption (Camacho-Otero, Boks, & Pettersen, 2018). Hence, as opposed to growth, attention should be further given to the health of these ecosystems and the surrounding places; thus, scaling up mindfully. For a sustainability-focused ecosystem, carefully managed growth which regenerates the regional and natural environment is desired. Especially because, overshooting the planetary boundaries would lead to negative dependencies. Put differently, "the very activity – industry development work – that can create enhanced social [or environmental] impact can also undermine it" (Islam, 2020: 4).

Second, like the relationship between place and ecosystems, place-based path dependence may also determine the success or failure of a CSP by affecting the early steps that set the trajectory of a collaboration (Bloomfield & Schleifer, 2017). Hence, even when place-based partnerships would aim to break away from the vicious cycle, actors' embeddedness in their places may play a restricting role for place-based partnerships (McDonald et al., 2010). Existing literature on organisational imprinting (Marquis & Tilcsik, 2013) has recognized that an organization's emergence conditions can affect its later development.

Third, the literature on ecosystems has been limited with regards to the ethical and moral tensions between different ecosystem actors and their stakeholders. Some showed how businesses often deal with such pressures through control tactics, as was the case for Facebook and eBay during the growth of their ecosystems (Thomas & Autio, 2014). This literature also discussed how actors might create collaborative spaces and employ different power strategies to generate outcomes that fit their interests (Ansari et al., 2016). We also

highlight that while we position CSPs as herding spaces, it would also be necessary to question who is herding this space, who dominates the process of a place-based frame development and solution creation; hence the role of herding spaces not only as allowing room for interaction and solution development but also becoming spaces of conflict emergence and resolution (Gray & Purdy, 2014).

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we have connected three streams of literature: the growing literature on spaces and places; CSPs; and ecosystems. Doing so, we have contributed to theory in several ways.

First, we have provided an illustrative example which shows that places may positively affect innovation ecosystems and create virtuous cycles. In our case, ecosystem actors already had place-based identities that connected them firmly to the natural environment. This connection encouraged and motivated them to regenerate their regional and natural environments. At the same time, we have discussed the potential of vicious cycles regarding the relationship between ecosystems and places. By examining the recursive nature of the relationships between places and ecosystems, we have added to the existing conversation on ecosystems (Audretsch, Cunningham, Kuratko, Lehmann, & Menter, 2019; Autio et al., 2018; Muñoz et al., 2020; Spigel & Harrison, 2018). Going beyond, we have provided a potential solution to the problem of identifying boundaries of ecosystems with the lens of place (Ritala & Almpanopoulou, 2017). Furthermore, by emphasising the role of the natural ecological environment as a place, we have brought the concept of ecosystem back to its ecological roots (Ritala & Almpanopoulou, 2017).

Second, we have demonstrated how CSPs provide herding spaces, joining the conversations others have started (Ometto et al., 2019), to address issues about places both at

the natural ecological and regional scales, and may become platforms for ecosystem actors to regenerate their places. Doing so, we have contributed to the research agenda of 'putting partnerships in their places' (Ryan et al., 2019). Furthermore, we explained the role of CSPs in developing and nurturing innovation ecosystems, hence went beyond the link others have discussed between inter-firm alliances and networks and ecosystems (Ansari et al., 2016; Shipilov & Gawer, 2020). Ecosystem emergence is a topic that has received considerable attention (Thomas & Autio, 2014), yet the role of cross-sector partnerships in the emergence process has not received enough attention. We propose that CSPs can be an essential antecedent for ecosystems, especially in contexts which intersect public and private interests. Beyond the circular economy, areas such as new digital ecosystems providing services in urban areas, e.g. mobility, distributed energy generation ecosystems or water treatment and provision, may be areas where CSPs could act as herding spaces to catalyse novel ecosystems.

Our work, however, is not without limitations. We provided some limited empirical support for our conceptual model using an illustrative case. While this exemplary case was helpful to showcase the conceptual model, we believe the model should be further extended and tested in the future.

First, we believe the conceptual model we built can be further improved through the theoretical lenses on path-dependence, path-breaking and path-creation (Garud, Gehman, & Karnøe, 2019; Karnøe & Garud, 2012). We highlight that comparative longitudinal cases can be helpful to explore how some places may encourage collaborative learning and ecosystems to flourish, while other places may damage ecosystem health and restrict collaborative learning. This would help to explain both the active role of places and the role of embedded agency. Imprinting theory could also be useful to understand how initial place characteristics affect an ecosystem or partnerships during its development.

Second, the observation we made about the virtuous and vicious cycles can further be explored through the lens of paradox theory (Keller & Sadler-Smith, 2019; Lewis, 2000; Pradies, Tunarosa, Lewis, & Courtois, 2020). In this domain, scholars have considered individual and organisational factors that spur vicious cycles (Schad, Lewis, Raisch, & Smith, 2016; Smith & Lewis, 2011). However, place-based tensions have received limited attention (Mazutis, Slawinski, & Palazzo, 2020; Slawinski et al., 2019), and are yet to demonstrate a detailed account of strategies that ecosystem actors can engage to break vicious cycles due to platial embeddedness. Beyond this, other theories such as complex systems theory may offer new insights on the virtuous and vicious cycles that place may generate in ecosystems and partnerships.

Third, while it was not the focus of this article, we have also discussed some ethical and moral issues at the intersection of place, partnerships and ecosystems. Moving forward, we note how these ethical and moral issues can be explored further using the lens of place-based ethics (Berthold-Bond, 2000; Malpas, 2012; Till, 2012). Malpas (2012: 23) warns that "our attachment to place, [may] foster division, exclusion and intolerance and violence – so much so that we may conclude that place, and the attachment to place, serves to undermine a properly ethical and politically acceptable way of life". Therefore, we see much value in the exploration of vicious and virtuous cycles and the potential of CSPs as herding spaces. We, however, end with a cautious statement that these spaces also carry the possibility of becoming spaces of exclusion for actors that are perceived to be radical (Smith, 1997) and highlight the need to explore the role of power in the place-making activities of CSPs.

Tables and Figures in the Manuscript

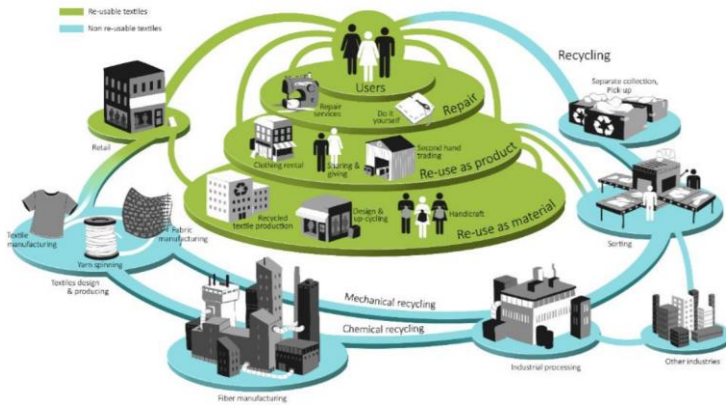


Figure 1 Circular Textile Ecosystem (From Fontell and Heikkilä (2017: 20))



Figure 2 Partners of Telaketju Tekes (Heikkilä et al., 2019)

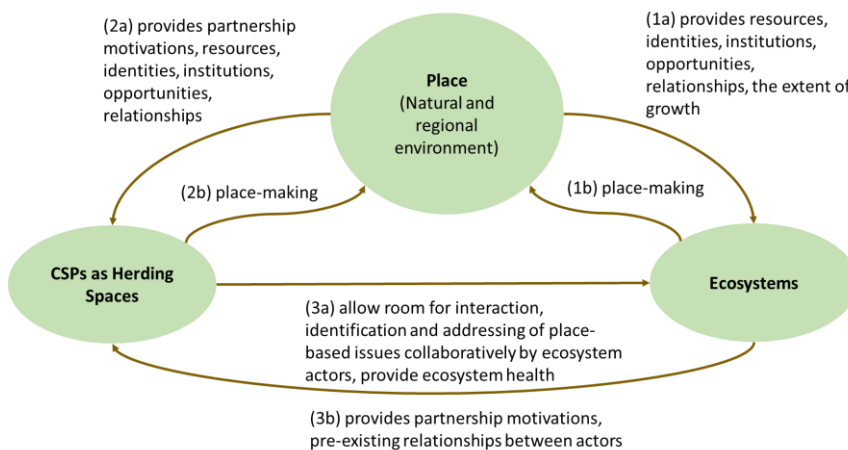


Figure 3 Dynamic and Recursive Relationships between Place (Natural and Regional Environment), CSPs as Herding Spaces and Ecosystems

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