Governance, Innovation, and Competency Transfer in the Regional Development Agencies of Peru: Lessons from the Tacna Case

Marcelo Gonzalo Cedamanos Rodríguez[1], David Alberto García Arango[2], Luis Fernando Garcés Giraldo[3]*

[1] Escuela de Posgrados, Universidad Continental, Perú. Email: mcedamanos@continental.edu.pe, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-1682-7493

[2] Universidad Autónoma del Perú, Perú. Email: dgarcia30@autonoma.edu.pe, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0032-4275

[3] Escuela de Posgrados, Universidad Continental, Perú. Email: lgarces@continental.edu.pe, ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3286-8704

Corresponding Author:

Marcelo Gonzalo Cedamanos Rodríguez[1]*
(mcedamanos@continental.edu.pe)

Abstract: This article analyzes the consolidation process of Regional Development Agencies (ARD) in Peru, focusing on the governance, innovation, and competence-transfer factors that shape their performance. Based on documentary review and a case study of the ARD of Tacna, it examines the structural limitations that have hindered full institutionalization of these entities, created to articulate public-private efforts toward regional competitiveness and territorial development. The paper identifies gaps in inter-institutional coordination, discontinuities in strategic planning, and weak innovation capacity of regional actors. Finally, it proposes an ARD–EDIR operational model aimed at strengthening multilevel governance, linking academia and productive sectors, and institutionalizing a performance indicator system (V1–V10) oriented toward measurable results,
Keywords: territorial governance, regional innovation, decentralization, competitiveness, regional development, ARD, Peru.

Introduction

The creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in Peru emerged within the framework of recommendations from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016), which highlighted the need to strengthen territorial coordination mechanisms to promote competitiveness and effective decentralization. In response, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, through a 2017 Resolution, promoted the progressive establishment of fifteen RDAs as public–private–academic–civil coordination bodies linked to the Regional Dialogue and Integration Spaces (EDIR) and the National Competitiveness and Productivity Plan 2019–2030 (PNCP). Nevertheless, despite regulatory advances, the Peruvian experience reveals a gap between the design of the model and its implementation. The RDAs have faced limitations in technical capacities, discontinuity in planning, and a weak alignment between national competitiveness policies and territorial dynamics., This article seeks to analyze the structural factors that explain these gaps, addressing three main dimensions: regional governance, innovation as a driver of coordination, and competency transfer as a condition for decentralized development. The analysis draws on the case of the RDA Tacna, recognized for its initial leadership in productive coordination (oregano, olives, citrus fruits) and for having developed consensus-building mechanisms with business and academic stakeholders. Despite this, the interruption of its plans in 2024 and institutional turnover highlight the challenges of ensuring the sustainability of RDAs at the national level.

Contextualization

The following concepts support and contextualize the scope of the research.

Beginning with contextual aspects, it is important to consider that the territorial governance approach proposes that regional development depends on the interaction among levels of government and social, business, and academic actors who coordinate collective strategies around common objectives (Peters & Pierre, 2020). In the Peruvian case, RDA governance seeks to materialize the principle of functional subsidiarity through the delegation of competencies to regions in order to strengthen their planning and management capacity. However, governance is not limited to formal structures; it requires trust, cooperation, and accountability mechanisms. The literature on multilevel governance (Marks & Hooghe, 2016) emphasizes that effective decentralization requires horizontal and vertical coordination among actors, as well as regional leadership with technical and political legitimacy.

Another concept of interest is territorial innovation, understood as a social process that goes beyond technological adoption and involves the co-creation of knowledge among local actors (Cooke et al., 2011). In this regard, RDAs should act as platforms for collective learning, facilitating applied research projects, technology transfer, and the strengthening of regional social capital. International experiences with Regional Development Agencies (Spain, Chile, Finland) demonstrate that their success lies in their ability to generate innovation ecosystems where the public sector, businesses, academia, and civil society converge. The OECD (2020) highlights that these systems operate effectively when performance indicators, institutional continuity, and ex post evaluation mechanisms are in place.

On the other hand, when considering the factors that drive decentralization processes, a relevant aspect relates to the transfer of competencies and the provision of goods and services. In Peru, RDAs were conceived as technical units supporting the management of productive and innovation policies, in coordination with regional governments. However, effective transfer depends on the capacity of territories to provide high-quality public goods and services (Urueña, 2022), consolidate technical teams, and manage sustainable resources. In this sense, the model for the provision of goods and services proposed by the National Center for Strategic Planning (CEPLAN, 2021) becomes relevant, as it asserts that decentralization must be accompanied by planning, monitoring, and evaluation instruments that guarantee measurable results. This principle underlies the proposal of a performance indicator system (V1–V10) developed in this study.

Methodology and Proposed Indicators

This study was developed using an analytical qualitative design based on document review, comparative analysis, and interviews with actors linked to the RDAs. The objective was to identify the structural factors that influence the institutional effectiveness of these agencies and to propose a monitoring model that allows for the evaluation of their performance.

3.1. Variables and Indicators

Three independent variables (V1–V3) and seven dependent variables (V4–V10) are defined, which allow for the evaluation of the overall functioning of the RDA–EDIR system and are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of variables for evaluating the functioning of the system.

Code	Dimension	General Indicator	Description
V1	Institutionality	Level of formalization and continuity of the annual work plan	Measures the existence of planning instruments, budgeting, and monitoring mechanisms.
V2	Governance	Participation of quadruple-helix actors	Assesses the diversity and frequency of participation in strategic committees and sectoral working groups.
V3	Interinstitutional Coordination	RDA–EDIR–PRDC integration	Determines the degree of coherence between regional and national plans.
V4	Productive Innovation	Number of R&D+i projects supported by the RDA	Relates the agency's coordination capacity with universities and innovation centers.
V5	Business Competitiveness	SMEs linked to prioritized value chains	Reflects business density and technological adoption.
V6	Human Capital	Training and certification of competencies	Measures training in management, innovation, and regional leadership.
V7	Equity and Inclusion	Participation of women and youth	Considers diversity within the supported productive chains.
V8	Environmental Sustainability	Circular economy and eco-innovation practices	Evaluates the adoption of clean technologies and efficient resource use.
V9	Internationalization	Regional alliances and exports	Measures articulation with international markets and technical cooperation.
V10	Competency Transfer	Implementation of decentralized functions	Verifies the application of the regional goods and services provision model.

Each indicator can be expressed using percentage-based or qualitative scales, depending on the availability of regional data. The results and analysis for each factor are presented below.

Results and Analysis

4.1. Institutional Governance Factors

The analysis suggests that the RDAs have progressed unevenly in their institutionalization process. Only a small group maintains active annual plans and permanent technical teams. Staff turnover and political dependence limit the consolidation of stable governance structures. In the case of Tacna, the creation of the AFIDE Strategic Committee and the implementation of sectoral technical roundtables represented significant progress, but their continuity was affected by changes in regional administration and the lack of sustained funding. Effective governance requires multilevel coordination between the National Government, regional governments, and territorial actors. However, fragmented competencies and the absence of a national monitoring system generate duplications and gaps. This highlights the need for a transparency and tracking platform that integrates information from all RDAs.

4.2. Innovation and the Role of Academia

RDAs face a gap in their innovation capacity. Although several regions have promoted applied research projects, coordination with universities and R&D centers remains limited. In Tacna, for example, progress in designations of origin (oregano and olive oil) and agro-innovation projects demonstrated potential but lacked systematic technology transfer mechanisms. International literature recognizes that territorial innovation is strengthened when universities act as articulating nodes between industry and the State (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2021). In the Peruvian context, it is proposed to strengthen this function through academic mentoring programs by productive chain, financed through competitive regional innovation funds.

4.3. Competency Transfer and Regional Capacities

One of the main challenges of the RDA model is the weak transfer of sectoral competencies. Regions lack clear mechanisms to assume delegated functions, perpetuating dependence on the central level. In this scenario, RDAs should play a technical mediation role, facilitating the adoption of the regional goods and services provision model defined by CEPLAN (2021). Capacity strengthening involves institutionalizing training programs for technical personnel, promoting expert mobility between regions, and establishing incentives for results-based management. The absence of a national policy for regional professionalization constitutes a structural obstacle to the sustainability of RDAs.

4.4. RDA–EDIR–PRDC Coordination

Integration among RDAs, Regional Dialogue and Integration Spaces (EDIR), and Regional Concerted Development Plans (PRDC) is still incipient. In practice, EDIRs have been limited to consultative spaces, while PRDCs do not incorporate specific goals or budgets linked to competitiveness. It is recommended to institutionalize an EDIR marker within PRDCs to make articulation actions visible and facilitate their evaluation.

Discussion

Proposed RDA–EDIR Operating Model

The proposed operating model is structured around four interdependent components:

Multilevel Governance: defined by clear roles and responsibilities among levels of government, the private sector, academia, and civil society. It establishes coordination and accountability mechanisms.

Results-Based Management: incorporating the V1–V10 indicator system and quarterly control dashboards that allow monitoring of progress in institutionality, innovation, equity, and impact.

Innovation and Learning: promoting technical mentoring programs, technology transfer, and interregional cooperation, prioritizing value chains with high export potential.

Sustainability and Financing: establishing a permanent fund for RDAs, supported by national and regional resources, aimed at innovation projects and capacity strengthening.

This model is designed to ensure institutional continuity and evidence-based evaluation, both necessary conditions for RDAs to effectively contribute to productive transformation and the reduction of territorial gaps.

Conclusions

Regional Development Agencies constitute a valuable instrument for territorial coordination, but their effectiveness depends on the consolidation of robust governance, sustained technical capacities, and clear mechanisms for interinstitutional coordination. The case of Tacna demonstrates that it is possible to move toward schemes of effective cooperation among actors, although the lack of political and budgetary continuity threatens the sustainability of the achievements obtained.

It is concluded that strengthening RDAs requires institutionalizing a national monitoring and evaluation system with standardized indicators (V1–V10) and consolidating a multilevel governance model with shared responsibilities and accountability, which will enable the effective transfer of competencies through the adoption of the regional goods and services provision model.

It is necessary to promote innovation and interregional cooperation by connecting universities, businesses, and governments, and to ensure financial sustainability through permanent funds and multi-year budgets. In this sense, the future of RDAs in Peru will depend on their ability to learn from regional experiences, consolidate knowledge networks, and build a shared development vision based on innovation and territorial equity..

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