Evaluation of the Institutional Effectiveness of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) in Peru: The Case of Tacna

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the institutional effectiveness of the Regional Development Agencies (ARD) in Peru through a case study of the Tacna ARD. Empirical evidence is drawn from surveys and interviews with members of the Strategic Committee and key stakeholders involved in the Regional Development and Innovation Strategy (EDIR). Findings reveal heterogeneous performance across the dimensions of governance, innovation, and competence transfer. While the Tacna ARD has consolidated inter-institutional coordination and progress in applied innovation projects, gaps persist regarding continuity, financing, and staff professionalization. The study concludes that ARD effectiveness relies on the formalization of multi-level governance structures, the institutionalization of performance dashboards (V1–V10), and stronger links between academia and the productive sector. The proposed framework can be replicated in other Peruvian regions
Keywords: ARD, governance, territorial innovation, decentralization, EDIR, competitiveness, Tacna

Introduction

Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) emerged in Peru as part of the effort to strengthen territorial governance and reduce the asymmetries present in the decentralization process. The recommendation of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) encouraged the creation of bodies that would coordinate public action with the productive, academic, and civil sectors. In 2017, the Presidency of the Council of Ministers promoted the establishment of fifteen RDAs across the country. These agencies were incorporated into the framework of the National Competitiveness and Productivity Plan 2019–2030 (PNCP) and the Regional Development and Innovation Strategies (EDIR), conceived as spaces for consensus-building among territorial actors.

In this context, the RDA Tacna became one of the most consolidated experiences. During its first stage (2018–2023), it promoted public–private coordination processes through sectoral technical roundtables, strategic committees, and projects associated with designations of origin such as Tacna oregano and olive oil. These initiatives helped position the region as a benchmark in agro-industrial innovation and territorial differentiation. However, the early closure of several operational plans in 2024 and the turnover of technical personnel revealed structural weaknesses related to the absence of recurrent funding, limited transfer of competencies, and weak connections with territorial planning instruments such as the Ecological and Economic Zoning (ZEE) and the Territorial Planning Plan (POT).

In this regard, evaluating the institutional effectiveness of RDAs is relevant to understanding the extent to which these entities are fulfilling their purpose of boosting regional competitiveness and reducing institutional fragmentation. Through the Tacna case, this study seeks to answer three key questions:

To what extent does the governance and institutional framework of the RDA ensure continuity and effective participation?

How are the results manifested in terms of innovation and interinstitutional coordination?

What progress and limitations exist in the transfer of competencies to regional governments?

The combination of quantitative instruments (surveys) and qualitative tools (interviews) allows for an integrated assessment of performance. The results are interpreted from an institutional effectiveness perspective, understood as the capacity of a public organization to achieve its strategic objectives through coordination, learning, and sustainability. This first section of the article contextualizes the importance of RDAs within Peru's decentralization policy and underscores the need to measure their performance using verifiable indicators. The following sections expand the theoretical framework, describe the methodology used, and present the empirical results of the Tacna case, complemented by comparative analysis and public policy recommendations.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of the institutional effectiveness of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) requires understanding their role within contemporary territorial governance systems, regional innovation processes, and the dynamics of competency transfer inherent to decentralization. These three dimensions interact within a framework that combines organizational capacities, interinstitutional coordination, and long-term sustainability.

2.1. Territorial Governance and Institutional Framework

Territorial governance is understood as a dynamic process of coordination among public, private, academic, and social actors, aimed at achieving shared development objectives within a specific territory (Peters & Pierre, 2020). It assumes the existence of mechanisms for consensus-building, legitimacy, and transparency, as well as the capacity of regional governments to lead shared strategic agendas. In the Latin American context, governance is linked to the transition from a centralist model to a multilevel governance approach, where decision-making is distributed across different territorial levels (Marks & Hooghe, 2016), promoting the participation of local actors in the design, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. In the Peruvian case, RDAs represent an attempt to materialize this approach through mixed structures that combine public management and private participation. However, their consolidation depends on the following factors:

a) the existence of stable regulatory frameworks,

b) the availability of sustainable budgets, and

c) the technical and political continuity of their working teams.

Institutional effectiveness, therefore, is not limited to the implementation of activities; rather, it implies the ability to sustain processes, build trust among actors, and translate strategic planning into tangible results. The literature on territorial development (ECLAC, 2022; OECD, 2020) suggests that successful institutional arrangements combine leadership, coordination, and results-oriented monitoring systems.

2.2. Innovation and Regional Coordination

The concept of territorial innovation stems from the notion of regional innovation systems (RIS), developed by Cooke, Uranga, and Etxebarria (2011), who argue that knowledge and technology are more effectively disseminated when local cooperation networks exist among firms, universities, technology centers, and public authorities. In this model, RDAs act as intermediary platforms that facilitate the circulation of knowledge and the alignment between technological supply and demand. Their function is to create conditions for applied R&D&I within the productive chains prioritized by the EDIR, generating effects on productivity, sustainability, and employment.

International experiences show that innovation is strengthened when coherent regional policies align with national competitiveness plans, innovation funds with shared governance, human capacities trained in technology management and transfer, and territorial-level impact measurement mechanisms. In the Peruvian case, the RDA Tacna stands as an example of early coordination between the productive sector and academia, particularly around designations of origin (DO) and agro-industrial diversification projects. The existence of a formal coordination structure allowed Tacna to advance in value-added strategies, although its sustainability depends on more consistent public policies.

The literature by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2021) on the triple helix (university–industry–government) and its extension to the quadruple helix (incorporating civil society) provides an appropriate analytical framework for interpreting the role of RDAs. These agencies should act as coordination nodes that promote not only technological innovation but also social and institutional innovation.

2.3. Competency Transfer and Institutional Sustainability

Competency transfer is an important process in decentralization, through which functions, responsibilities, and resources are delegated from the central level to regional and local governments (Urueña, 2022). Its objective is to strengthen the territory's capacity to provide quality public goods and services aligned with local needs. According to the National Center for Strategic Planning (CEPLAN, 2021), an effective transfer of competencies must be accompanied by three basic conditions:

– Regulatory clarity, defining precisely the delegated functions and coordination mechanisms.

– Technical and institutional capacities in the receiving regions, enabling effective exercise of the competencies.

– Financial sustainability, guaranteeing the continuity of decentralized services.

In the case of RDAs, competency transfer is related to their capacity to autonomously manage competitiveness, innovation, and productive development policies, while remaining aligned with national guidelines. However, available evidence shows that most regions face significant limitations in human resources, technical infrastructure, and budgetary stability. The model of public goods and services provision proposed by CEPLAN (2021) suggests that each agency should become a facilitator of institutional learning and an operational instrument of the decentralization process. From this perspective, RDAs also transfer knowledge, generate evidence, and strengthen the capacities of local actors.

In this regard, the specialized literature converges in stating that the effectiveness of RDAs depends on their ability to integrate collaborative governance, territorial innovation, and sustainable competency transfer. These three pillars constitute the conceptual framework upon which the empirical evaluation of the Tacna case is designed.

Methodology

The study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, descriptive and analytical in nature, with a qualitative predominance. Its purpose was to evaluate the institutional effectiveness of the RDA Tacna based on the triangulation of three sources:

a) structured surveys

b) semi-structured interviews

c) documentary analysis of regional planning instruments and the minutes of strategic committees.

The research follows a non-experimental, cross-sectional design focused on measuring perceptions and identifying patterns of institutional performance. Accordingly, the aim was to capture both the quantitative results derived from the survey and the qualitative narratives expressed in the interviews. A concurrent mixed-methods design was chosen (Creswell, 2018), in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected in parallel and integrated during the interpretation phase. Through this approach, relationships were established between the dimensions of analysis (governance, innovation, competency transfer) and the factors that explain the institutional effectiveness of the RDA.

The study population consisted of members of the Strategic Committee of the RDA Tacna, representing the public, private, academic, and social sectors. From this population, an intentional sample of 11 participants was obtained, who completed the questionnaire administered between January and March 2024. The interviewees included officials from the Regional Government, representatives of business associations, local universities, civil society organizations, and sectoral leaders linked to productive chains (oregano, olive, citrus, avocado). The main instrument was a structured questionnaire. This instrument was designed to measure stakeholders' perceptions of the institutional effectiveness of the RDA based on ten variables (V1–V10) distributed across the dimensions presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of study variables.

Code	Dimension	General Indicator	Description
V1	Governance	Institutional formalization	Existence of planning instruments and accountability mechanisms.
V2	Institutionality	Technical and budgetary continuity	Stability of teams, budget, and management structure.
V3	Coordination	Interinstitutional participation	Coordination with EDIR, ZEE, and POT.
V4	Innovation	Knowledge management	Participation in R&D&I projects, DO initiatives, and technology transfer.
V5	Business competitiveness	SME integration	Prioritized value chains and linkage with markets.
V6	Human capital	Local talent development	Training in leadership, management, and innovation.
V7	Inclusion	Gender and youth approach	Diverse participation in RDA processes.
V8	Environmental sustainability	Circular economy	Eco-efficient practices in productive chains.
V9	Internationalization	External partnerships	Linkage with international cooperation.
V10	Competency transfer	Institutional autonomy	Execution of decentralized functions and provision of public goods.

Each item was assessed using three response options: "Yes," "No," and "Does not know," allowing the calculation of the proportion of affirmative responses (%YES) as a measure of positive perception toward institutional management.

Regarding the validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by three experts in public management and territorial development, who evaluated its relevance, clarity, and coherence with the study's objectives. Content validity was obtained through an Aiken's V coefficient (V = 0.91), confirming the adequacy of the items to the proposed theoretical dimensions. In addition, a pilot test was conducted with three participants to verify the comprehensibility of the questions and the consistency of the responses.

Quantitative data were processed through spreadsheet tabulation, and the results are expressed as the percentage of affirmative responses (%YES). Qualitative data were organized into thematic analysis matrices (Atlas.ti), allowing the identification of emerging categories associated with perceptions of the RDA, leadership, innovation, and territorial coordination.

The analysis was structured at three complementary levels:

Descriptive level: calculation of the percentage of positive responses (%YES) per item, obtaining an overall overview of each dimension.

Interpretative level: triangulation with qualitative information from interviews and field observations.

Propositional level: identification of gaps and formulation of recommendations to strengthen institutional effectiveness.

Each dimension (Governance and Institutionality, Innovation and Coordination, Competency Transfer and Sustainability) is addressed in the results section with its respective detailed tables and analytical interpretation.

Results

The results obtained from the surveys and interviews applied to the members of the Strategic Committee of the RDA Tacna show a heterogeneous pattern across the analyzed dimensions. Overall, perceptions are positive in aspects related to governance and innovation, while competency transfer appears as the weakest component of the institutional model.

4.1. Governance and Institutionality

The governance and institutionality evaluates the extent to which the RDA Tacna has succeeded in formalizing its organizational structure, ensuring stakeholder participation, consolidating transparency mechanisms, and aligning its plans with regional instruments (ZEE, POT, PRDC).

Below are the detailed results of this dimension, corresponding to 23 items from the applied questionnaire.

Table 2. Results of the Governance and Institutionality Dimension.

Question	Item	Yes	No	Does Not Know	Total	%Yes
1	The EDIR has prioritization agreements validated by territorial actors	10	1	0	11	90.9
2	Participating actors consider that the EDIR priorities are pertinent	9	2	0	11	81.8
3	There is an updated internal regulation for the operation of the RDA	5	3	3	11	45.5

4	The RDA maintains an updated annual operational plan	6	3	2	11	54.5
5	The Strategic Committee meets with an adequate frequency	7	2	2	11	63.6
6	The decisions of the Strategic Committee are formally recorded in minutes	8	1	2	11	72.7
7	Business participation in technical roundtables is representative	7	3	1	11	63.6
8	The RDA promotes the participation of universities and research centers	8	2	1	11	72.7
9	Civil society participation is ensured	6	3	2	11	54.5
10	The EDIR incorporates a gender equality approach	5	3	3	11	45.5
11	The EDIR incorporates an intercultural approach	5	3	3	11	45.5
12	There is coordination between the EDIR and the ZEE and POT instruments	4	5	2	11	36.4
13	Prioritized projects respond to the region's productive vocation	7	3	1	11	63.6
14	The RDA has support from the Regional Government for its operation	7	2	2	11	63.6
15	The RDA has support from local governments	5	4	2	11	45.5
16	Private actors show sustained commitment to the RDA	6	3	2	11	54.5
17	The decisions of the RDA are publicly disseminated	5	4	2	11	45.5
18	There is coordination between the RDA and national competitiveness programs	6	3	2	11	54.5
19	The RDA manages information on public transparency platforms	4	5	2	11	36.4
20	The RDA plans include monitoring indicators	6	3	2	11	54.5
21	There is a specific budget available for the operation of the RDA	5	4	2	11	45.5
22	Compliance with institutional goals is periodically evaluated	6	3	2	11	54.5
23	There are accountability mechanisms for regional actors	6	3	2	11	54.5

The results show governance that is relatively strengthened in terms of legitimacy and participation, but with weaknesses in operational formalization. A total of 90.9% of respondents acknowledge that the EDIR priorities were collectively validated, while 81.8% consider them pertinent for regional development. However, the aspects related to planning and internal management reveal fragility, as only 45.5% confirm the existence of an operational regulation and 54.5% report having updated annual plans.

Likewise, a coordination gap is observed with territorial planning instruments (ZEE and POT), with only 36.4% affirmative responses. This indicates that although the RDA has social legitimacy, its integration with regional planning systems has yet to be consolidated. Qualitative interviews reinforce this finding, as stakeholders value the participatory dynamics but mention the lack of stable resources, staff turnover, and the absence of an autonomous budget.

4.2. Innovation and Coordination

The second dimension measures the capacity of the RDA Tacna to promote innovation projects, technological coordination, and capacity-building within the prioritized productive sectors (oregano, olive oil, citrus, and avocado). The three items included in the questionnaire allow visualization of the degree of academic participation, the promotion of applied research, and the existence of tangible results in territorial innovation.

Table 3. Survey Results. Innovation and Coordination.

Question	Item	Yes	No	Does Not Know	Total	%Yes
24	Innovation projects linked to the prioritized value chains have been developed	8	2	1	11	72.7
25	The RDA promotes coordination with universities and research centers	8	2	1	11	72.7
26	There is progress in processes related to designations of origin and territorial differentiation	8	2	1	11	72.7

The data show a high level of consensus (72.7%) regarding the existence of innovation initiatives and applied research. Interviews highlight achievements related to designations of origin—especially Tacna oregano—as well as progress in the olive oil certification process.

Stakeholders recognize that the RDA has helped position innovation as a strategic axis; however, they warn that projects lack systematic technical follow-up and multi-year funding. Qualitatively, interviewees emphasize the need to strengthen the university–industry link by incorporating mentorship programs for each value chain and R&D&I projects with measurable objectives. The territorial innovation approach is perceived more as an emerging initiative than as a consolidated institutional policy.

4.3. Competency Transfer and Sustainability

The third dimension addresses the RDA Tacna's capacity to exercise decentralized functions, manage its own resources, and sustain its operations beyond political cycles. The item included in the questionnaire reflects stakeholders' perceptions regarding the degree of progress in the effective transfer of competencies to the regional level.

Question	Item	Yes	No	Does Not Know	Total	%Yes
27	The RDA has the necessary conditions to carry out delegated functions and manage regional public goods and services	6	4	1	11	54.5

The results reveal a divided perception regarding the RDA's capacity to assume decentralized functions. Only 54.5% of respondents consider that adequate conditions exist to exercise delegated functions, while 36.4% express doubts or lack of knowledge on the matter. From a qualitative perspective, stakeholders highlight as the main limitations the absence of an autonomous budget that would allow operational independence, the turnover of technical staff—which prevents the consolidation of institutional experience—and the lack of clear national guidelines regarding the competencies effectively transferred to the regions.

Despite these constraints, interviewees acknowledge the political will and technical leadership of the RDA Tacna in project coordination. However, the absence of a permanent fund and a national RDA–EDIR indicator system hinders the consolidation of the model.

Discussion

The analysis of the results shows that the institutional effectiveness of the Regional Development Agency (RDA) of Tacna is at an intermediate stage of maturity, characterized by significant progress in governance and territorial coordination, but limited by structural factors related to sustainability and institutional autonomy. These findings align with the OECD (2016, 2020), which indicates that Peruvian decentralization continues to face persistent challenges involving technical continuity, budget allocation, and coordination across levels of government.

Survey results, with an overall average of 65.6% affirmative responses in the governance dimension, reflect an environment of legitimacy and broad participation. Moreover, the existence of prioritization agreements validated by territorial actors (90.9%) and the positive perception regarding the relevance of EDIR priorities (81.8%) suggest the consolidation of institutional dialogue spaces. However, these achievements coexist with weaknesses in operational formalization and internal management, as evidenced by the low percentage of respondents confirming the existence of regulations and updated annual plans (45.5% and 54.5%, respectively). This contrast supports the arguments of Peters and Pierre (2020), who assert that effective governance requires both social legitimacy and stable administrative structures that ensure predictability and accountability. Likewise, the RDA's coordination with territorial planning instruments—such as Ecological and Economic Zoning (ZEE) and the Territorial Planning Plan (POT)—remains incipient (36.4%), reinforcing the hypothesis of institutional fragmentation between competitiveness agendas and regional planning systems. This misalignment has also been identified by ECLAC (2022) as a common obstacle in Latin American regional governance processes, where coordination between sectoral and territorial policies tends to be weak.

In terms of innovation, the RDA Tacna presents an encouraging outlook. A total of 72.7% of respondents acknowledge progress in innovation projects and coordination with universities, especially regarding the designations of origin for oregano and olive oil. These initiatives represent the consolidation of a territorial innovation dynamic, understood as a territory's capacity to generate knowledge, collective learning, and value added from its endogenous resources (Cooke, Uranga & Etxebarria, 2011). However, the still incipient nature of technical monitoring mechanisms and multi-year financing restricts the sustainability of these efforts, in line with warnings by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2021) on the fragility of regional ecosystems when university–industry–government alliances are not institutionalized in permanent structures.

Interviewees emphasize the importance of strengthening academic linkages, establishing shared indicator dashboards, and professionalizing technical teams. These observations align with the triple helix framework (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2021), which argues that regional innovation emerges from structured interaction between universities, firms, and governments, as well as with the extension proposed by Carayannis and Campbell (2020), who incorporate civil society into a sustainability-oriented quadruple helix. In Tacna's case, the presence of academic actors in technical roundtables has raised the level of technical dialogue, although the institutionalization of their participation within a formal knowledge governance framework remains pending.

The competency transfer dimension, with an average of 54.5% affirmative responses, reveals a perception of limited capacity of the RDA to exercise decentralized functions and manage regional public goods. This situation stems from the absence of financial autonomy and the lack of clear guidelines regarding delegated competencies from the central government. According to CEPLAN (2021), effective decentralization requires regulatory clarity, strengthened technical capacities, and budget sustainability—conditions that have not yet been fully met in the regions. The RDA Tacna, despite its leadership efforts, depends heavily on the resources of the Regional Government and is vulnerable to political turnover, which restricts institutional continuity. This dependency supports the argument of Urueña (2022), who notes that decentralization policies in Latin America frequently create "conditional autonomies," in which regions acquire responsibilities without the necessary resources or capacities to effectively fulfill them. In this regard, the case of Tacna illustrates a semi-decentralized model with formal coordination structures but lacking the administrative and financial instruments required to exercise real autonomy.

The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data makes it possible to identify three key patterns. First, the participatory legitimacy achieved by the RDA Tacna demonstrates the effectiveness of the public–private coordination model. Second, the asymmetry between innovation and institutionality reveals that technical progress does not always translate into stable structures. Third, financial dependence exposes the vulnerability of agencies to regional political shifts. This last aspect aligns with the conclusions of Marks and Hooghe (2016), who warn of the risks in multilevel governance systems when coordinated financing mechanisms across government levels are absent.

Finally, the evidence from the Tacna case contributes to the broader discussion on institutional effectiveness in decentralized contexts. Consistent with the reflections of Pike, Rodríguez-Pose, and Tomaney (2017), effectiveness should not be understood solely as the execution of projects or targets, but as the capacity to generate sustainable processes of institutional learning and inter-actor coordination. Despite its limitations, the RDA Tacna has emerged as a reference for regional coordination and a laboratory of institutional innovation that can serve as a replicable model for other regions in Peru.

Conclusions

The study of the institutional effectiveness of the Regional Development Agency (RDA) of Tacna provides insight into the dynamics and tensions that shape territorial governance structures in Peru. The empirical evidence collected through surveys and interviews shows that the RDA Tacna has succeeded in building legitimacy and recognition among regional actors, consolidating itself as an interinstitutional coordination space capable of articulating productive, academic, and governmental sectors. However, its sustainability still depends on external factors, particularly the political and financial support of the Regional Government, which restricts its capacity for autonomy. This finding confirms what the OECD (2020) and ECLAC (2022) indicate: decentralization policies in Latin America tend to create institutions with high social capital but weak formal institutionalization.

Territorial governance in Tacna has shown notable progress in the legitimacy of participatory processes but continues to face shortcomings in administrative formalization and alignment with regional planning instruments. The absence of a stable regulatory framework, the lack of updated regulations, and budgetary intermittency affect the RDA's ability to sustain long-term planning processes. In this regard, the experience of Tacna reaffirms the argument of Peters and Pierre (2020) that regional governance must combine social legitimacy with consolidated administrative structures. Institutional effectiveness cannot rely solely on the goodwill of actors; it requires clear rules, formal procedures, and permanent resources.

The weakest dimension of the model analyzed corresponds to competency transfer. Although the RDA Tacna has demonstrated technical capacity and political leadership, the lack of a legal framework granting it operational and budgetary autonomy limits its scope. Decentralization in Peru, as noted by Urueña (2022), continues to be partial and dependent on central government levels, creating a scenario of conditional autonomy. Consequently, the agency operates more as a coordination and dialogue space than as an implementing body for regional policies. This structural limitation prevents the RDA from fully fulfilling its role as a territorial management instrument and provider of decentralized public goods.

Institutional effectiveness—understood as an organization's capacity to achieve its strategic objectives through coordinated, sustainable, and adaptive processes—must be analyzed beyond immediate results. In Tacna's case, the progress observed translates into strengthened relational capital and collective learning among actors, which constitutes a solid foundation for future institutionalization processes. The regional development literature (Pike, Rodríguez-Pose & Tomaney, 2017) emphasizes that the success of territorial policies lies in the ability to generate institutional learning cycles in which errors and achievements become organizational knowledge. The RDA Tacna approaches this model, although its consolidation will depend on regulatory stability and technical continuity within its teams.

From a public policy perspective, the results of this study suggest that the RDA–EDIR model represents an opportunity to strengthen regional reindustrialization and sustainable competitiveness in Peru. Achieving this, however, requires a coherent national policy that formalizes the functions of the agencies, establishes a permanent financing system, and aligns performance indicators with national planning instruments (CEPLAN, 2021). It is also essential to strengthen human capital formation in governance, innovation, and territorial management, ensuring the permanence of well-trained technical teams committed to long-term objectives.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the RDA Tacna serves as a reference in the transition toward collaborative and innovation-based territorial development models. Its experience demonstrates that institutional effectiveness is not achieved solely through formal structures, but through the density of trust-based relationships and collective learning that actors are able to build. Consolidating this model requires a state vision that transcends government periods and embraces a multilevel governance approach in which participation, innovation, and decentralization become sustainable practices embedded in the institutional culture of regional development in Peru.

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