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# Deploying the bioeconomy through bioclusters: Between European policy imaginary and conflicting territorial appropriation. A French case study

Adebo Jean-Daniel Houeto\*†<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>REGARDS - EA 6292 – Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne, France – France

## Abstract

To address 21st century challenges such as climate change, food security, and the depletion of natural resources, European institutions have placed the bioeconomy at the core of their public policies. Promoted as a development model that tackles these challenges while fostering economic growth, the bioeconomy is being implemented across EU member states, with a strong emphasis on creating bioclusters. If bioclusters have such a crucial role to play in the deployment of the bioeconomy, key questions arise : How do they form and structure themselves within specific regions? Can existing models be replicated elsewhere? And what about their sustainability?

This study addresses the conditions for the emergence of bioclusters through two main lenses. First, it examines the European Smart Specialization Strategy, a key policy framework supporting the deployment of the bioeconomy across European regions. Second, it analyzes an ongoing initiative to establish an industrial hemp biocluster in the French department of Aube.

By integrating proximity and heritage economics and through a narrative approach, the study reveals that bioclusters emerge as a result of an imaginary according to which the deployment of the bioeconomy requires the formation of bioeconomy clusters. This imaginary, based on the myth of the omnipotence of geographical proximity, shapes European public policies that promote the bioeconomy. It also has a performative effect on territorial actors involved in the valorization of non-food biomass.

The study also shows that this imaginary, by targeting territorial heritage, can lead to ecological contradictions. In fact, by focusing on dominant value chains and dominant players in territories in order to build bioclusters, this imaginary can lead to lock-ins, leaving unexploited the rich diversity of bioeconomy models, which is nevertheless invaluable for the ecological transition of territories.

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\*Speaker

†Corresponding author: [adebo-jean-daniel.houeto1@univ-reims.fr](mailto:adebo-jean-daniel.houeto1@univ-reims.fr)

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