02 Higher Education for Smart Specialisation (HESS)

Type of support / service available

Targeted support to regional authorities on how to engage their local Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the process of design and implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3).

Relevance for regional authorities

Most regional authorities have the responsibility of designing and implementing S3. This includes engaging with institutions in their territories such as higher education institutions through the adoption of participatory methods. In order to promote constructive partnerships based on mutual understanding, it will be necessary to bridge the cultural differences that sometimes may exist between policy makers and academics. This project provides support for regions to bridge this cultural gap, through analysis of the opportunities and challenges, and participatory activities with representatives of the local higher education institutions. The project can also support regional authorities in making better decisions on how to use European funds as well as other programmes and reforms to increase the contribution of higher education to their S3.

Policy context

Smart Specialisation is an approach to knowledge-based development that is central to the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Furthermore, it underpins the new Cohesion Policy, taking on a place-based dimension. Smart specialisation calls for regions to identify, through an 'entrepreneurial process of discovery', the innovative domains that have most potential, and establish these as priorities for public investment. Yet these priority domains should not be inward looking; they should be demand led, focusing on global value chains and societal challenges. The last five years have seen the design of more than a hundred 'Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3)', which underpin innovation on spending from the European Regional Development Fund, as well as other EU and national funding programmes.

Higher education has a key role to play in smart specialisation because it sources highly-skilled human capital that is vital for knowledge-based regional development. This has been underlined by the Commission in its recent Communication on a Renewed EU Agenda for Higher Education[1].

While innovation is usually associated with new technologies, it is their use not their invention that provides most economic and social value - hence the need for skilled human capital that can absorb and adapt to technological change. Furthermore, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are uniquely placed to act as 'boundary spanners' by integrating their different missions of teaching, research and external engagement in 'knowledge triangles' that can drive regional development.

How to use

The main activity of Higher Education for Smart Specialisation (HESS) is 'action research' in selected regions that aims to nurture closer partnerships between regional authorities and higher education institutions while collecting examples of how higher education is demonstrably contributing to the implementation of S3. Two pilots in Navarra (Spain) and North East Romania have been completed and three more have been launched in Puglia (Italy), Centre Val de la Loire (France), and South Moravia (Czech Republic). The methods are illustrated in the next figure. Regional authorities are invited to contact the JRC[2] if they are interested in participating in this programme. In addition, regions can access a developing repository of good practice on the S3 Platform website[3], as well as ongoing analysis of how European funds are being spent on higher education and its role in regional development.

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1. https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/he-com-2017-247_en.pdf
2. Smart Specialisation Platform email address: jrc-ipts-s3platform@ec.europa.eu
3. http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/hess

BACKGROUND ANALYSIS (S3 POLICY MIX, ESIF, HE SYSTEM, REGIONAL CONTEXT)

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP WITH HEI MANAGERS

EXPLORATORY VISIT

INTERVIEWS WITH HEI MANAGERS

PEER REVIEW WITH OTHER REGIONS

HEINNOVATE TOOL

MAPPING OF GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

WORKSHOP WITH INDUSTRY AND CIVIL SOCIETY

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT LABS

Proposal of target support for regions to engage with local higher education institutions.

Impact

Working with JRC on higher education and smart specialisation will help regions to understand and cooperate more closely with higher education institutions in their region. In addition to a better implementation of S3, these partnerships may be able to help in the monitoring and evaluation of S3 in the future. Finally, regions will be doing a service to the HEIs by raising their profile among networks of regions and universities, which can potentially lead to new European projects.