

03 Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) Peer Reviews Activities

Type of support / service available

To support the design and implementation of research and innovation strategies for Smart Specialisation (S3), the S3 platform of the Joint Research Centre is developing methodological and benchmarking tools to facilitate the S3 processes in regions and member states. One of the methodological supports provided is the S3 peer reviews developed by the platform.

Peer review means that an action of an individual person is looked at by an entity of similar competence. Applied to S3 processes it means that the design and implementation activities of S3 of regional and national governments is looked at by peers, which are other entities being responsible for the same activity. It entails a process of self-regulation by involving qualified individuals or qualified representatives of given authorities within the relevant field. The methodology has been designed to maintain standards, to improve performance and to provide credibility, thus the S3 platform has been organizing the peer reviews to facilitate trans-regional or transnational learning, to discover good practices in relation to challenges regions are facing and to overcome these challenges by understanding the institutional context.

The developed methodology requires a community of experts in a given (and often narrowly defined) field, who are qualified and able to perform impartial review. Throughout the experiences of the S3 platform, the peer reviews organised have achieved to create an atmosphere that promoted an open and dynamic dialogue to the region or member state having been peer reviewed.



Peer eXchange & Learning (PXL) builds on the S3 Platform peer-review approach.

In the implementation phase, the methodology has been adjusted to the needs of regional and national authorities implementing S3 strategies. The new format is called Peer eXchange & Learning (PXL) that builds on the well-established peer-review approach of the S3 Platform. It supports transnational learning by bringing together regions and countries for knowledge and experience exchange, and the exploration of ways in which innovation and development strategies can be effectively implemented, adjusted and revised.

Relevance for regional authorities

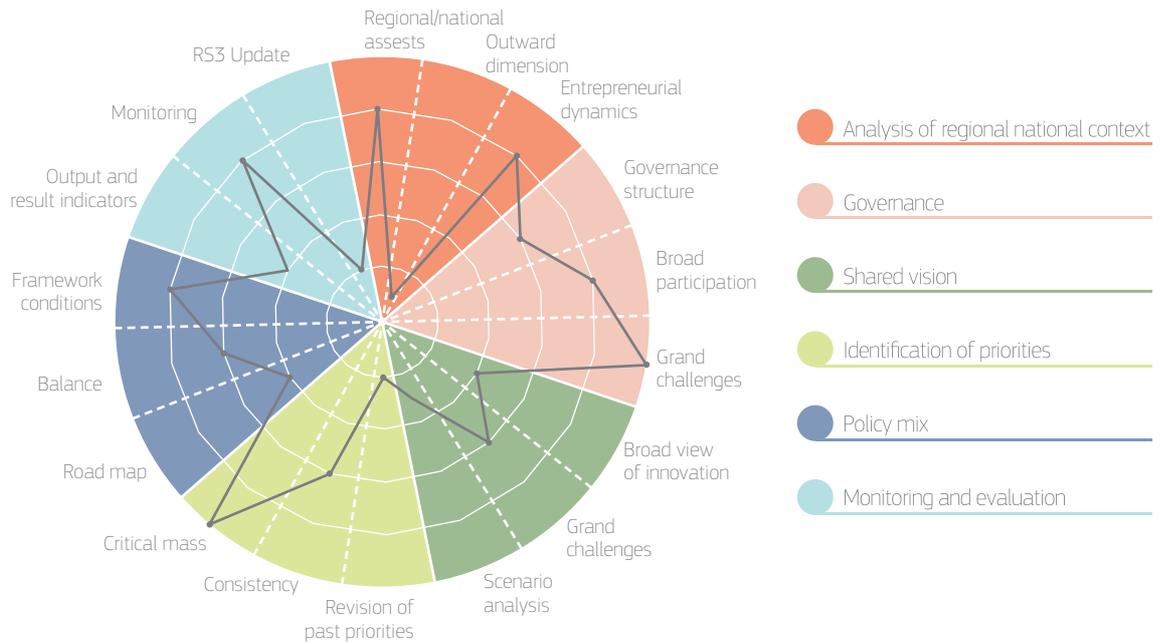
Peer reviews help regions and member states to identify challenges or weaknesses within the design and implementation of their S3 processes and improve them in a timely manner.

To this end, regions and member states present their S3 processes. Regions and countries volunteer to be reviewed in an attempt to source both critical and well-timed advice addressing specific issues they are

currently facing in the implementation of innovation and development strategies.

Exchanging good practice and experience is one of the core objectives of the S3 platform peer reviews. To help not only the peer reviewed region but all regions and national authorities present at the events to learn from each other's experiences.

Driving economic change through smart specialisation/RIS3
Informal assessment - region XXX



The self-assessment wheel represents the progress made in drafting/designing a RIS3 and condenses a huge amount of information in one image.

The S3 Platform has published one working paper¹ describing this newly developed peer review methodology and another working paper² presenting experiences and perceived impact from the regions and countries which were reviewed in the first twelve workshops during 2012 and 2013. The self-assessment wheel (accompanying image) is a part of the methodology.

Policy context

Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) are an ex ante conditionality for using the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the support of research and innovation for the period 2014-2020.

During the current programming period, investments are to be concentrated on four key priorities: innovation and research; digital agenda; support for small and medium-sized businesses; and the low-carbon economy. Article 9 of the general Regulation on the EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) lists the 11 'thematic objectives' which are to be supported. In this framework, thematic objective 1 focuses on investments in research and innovation. This objective envisages that all regions or Members States develop research and innovation strategies for smart specialisation (RIS3) which should guide the spending of both ESIF and other public/private investments. Over EUR 37 billion, which represents 19% of the total ERDF available, are allocated to strengthening research, technological development and innovation (Thematic Objective 1).

1. Midtkandal, Inger and Ruslan Rakhmatullin (2013): "The S3 Platform Peer Review Methodology. S3 Working Paper Series No. 02/2014." Publications Office of the European Union, Web. <<http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC85133/jrc85133.pdf>>.
 2. Midtkandal, Inger and Fatime Barbara Hegyi (2013): "Taking stock after two years of S3 Peer Review Workshops. S3 Working Paper Series No. 07/2014." Publications Office of the European Union, Web <http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC92890/final_workingpaper_peer%20review%20under%20review.pdf>

How to use

If a region or country is registered to the S3 Platform and wishes its smart specialisation strategy to be peer-reviewed, please contact the S3 Platform³.

Peer reviews allow regions and countries to put targeted questions to their peers and get relevant feedback. During the period 2012-2014, seventeen peer-review workshops were organised, allowing a total of 53 regions and 15 member states to be peer-reviewed. So far, 21 events were organised with an average of 40 participants per event. The concrete outputs are available through the S3 Platform website⁴.

Since 2015, the peer review workshops have taken a slightly different format, focusing on fewer regions per workshop. The more the S3 process is progressing, the more topics for discussions move towards dimensions reflecting the implementation of the S3 Strategies rather than the development of the strategies itself.

During the workshop, the S3 Platform team members collect relevant information and data covering different elements of each PXL exercise. To ensure regions and countries under review receive adequate feedback from their peers, the S3 Platform triangulates the feedback and information provided by three groups of participants through an online survey: regions and countries under review; their peers; and experts. Based on the feedback from three groups of participants, the S3 Platform team further develops summary/feedback reports.

Impact

A survey run by the S3 Platform together with around 50 regions/countries having had their strategy peer-reviewed showed that 90% of the respondents rated the usefulness of the overall exercise with 5 and 4 (out of a scale of 5). Over 50% of the respondents confirmed that the peer review made them introduce changes in the on-going work with the RIS3 process. Most importantly the exercise appeared to be useful in terms of making the participants more conscious of the elements in the RIS3 process. One value of the exercise seems to have been to really understand what Smart Specialisation is. This might have been particularly the case in the early stage of workshop series and early stage of Smart Specialisation itself.

3. jrc-ipts-s3platform@ec.europa.eu

4. <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3-design-peer-review>