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BRIDGING COMPETENCE INFRASTRUCTURE GAPS AND SPEEDING UP REGIONAL GROWTH

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INTRODUCTION: Regions across Europe face challenges deriving from the effectiveness of their RIS3 implementation. In some cases, challenges relate to the process of valorizing research results, while in other cases to the transformation and renewal of regional economies. In most cases, the overarching improvement need is for better RIS3 implementation governance, to deal with; (a) relatively weak impact of RIS3 on growth, jobs & regional economy renewal, linked to low upscale investments, research excellence absorptiveness, and exploitation of related variety potential, (b) mismatches between RIS3 productive and RDI bases, (c) distance from and better exploitation of research excellence as a path to further specialization, and (d) restricted resources towards RIS3 impact. To that end, the BRIDGES project, which is funded under the Interreg Europe Programme, aims assist regions to benefit from policy learning and enhance industry-led Centers of Competence as RIS3 implementation units. Within the project, the industry-led focus is on bio-economy.

METHODS: The project addresses the regional development issues by improving the Structural Funds for the purpose of RIS3 implementation. RIS3 is an ex-ante conditionality of the EU Regional & Cohesion policy & therefore relates to the EU2020 strategy, which builds on three mutually reinforcing priorities, namely smart growth, sustainable growth and inclusive growth. The BRIDGES project focuses on RIS3, thus it primarily contributes to smart growth. Through its focus on bio-economy, it contributes to sustainable growth and industrial

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development. In brief, the project: (i) Addresses needed improvements in reference to RIS3 opportunities and related investments, leading to 'RIS3 paths', which 'bridge' research-to-industry and accesses bio-economy's huge potential for regional economy renewal; (ii) Examines the bio-economy industries and focuses on businesses that are truly showing growth dynamics; (iii) Adopts an excellence-led approach in policy learning, integrating state-of-the-art contributions, (iv) Invests in the European dimension of the Centers of Competence (highly promoted within Horizon 2020) as RIS3 implementation units, by sharing of experience and joint initiatives.

RESULTS: During the first year of the BRIDGES project's implementation, ten good practices from the participating regions have been collected and evaluated. The good practices are categorized into three themes, (i) industry-led Centers of Competence that facilitate RIS3 implementation, (ii) cooperation between industry and research institutes, and (iii) multilevel synergies to support innovation. Those practices vary from strategical initiatives, such as the common use of large research infrastructure from universities, innovation agencies and SMEs within a region, to very specific/innovative services which are developed by research organizations and could be used/exploited by local/regional business companies.

CONCLUSIONS: The BRIDGES project addresses a relative gap in the RIS3 that of tactical level implementation. It tackles, ultimately, a classical challenge of the knowledge-based economy, i.e. how research can provably and deliberately be a manageable change agent for regional, non-core economies. During its 5-years duration, the project is expected to significantly improve the participating regions' RIS3 implementation governance and the delivery of the structural funds.