

## Transregional access to innovation on demand

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### Summary

**The Transregional access to innovation on demand** is research based on empirical experience analysis. It discusses how the Interreg Europe project BRIDGES (Bridging competence infrastructure gaps and speeding up growth and jobs delivery in regions; index number PGI00040, <https://www.interregeurope.eu/bridges/>) applied innovation options in transnational contexts to address mismatches between the economic, research & knowledge bases of the partner regions and thus improve the RIS3 delivery of the partner regions. The BRIDGES project asked an old question, interpreted in a renewed reference framework: **how and under what conditions, can research-to-business cooperation between advanced and less advanced regions lead to win-win results and types of development approaches?** To answer this question, the project strategy was to identify compatible development strengths between and among the regions and based on them, to proceed with matchmaking activities. The implementation process led to review deeper the issue of mutually beneficial co-operations between strong and less strong innovation regions.

To gain further insights into the resonance of the BRIDGES project with regional policy makers, and especially those that committed to the pilot action and, therefore, dedicated considerable resources to testing and making permanent transregional collaboration schemes, the three relevant authorities were interviewed. One interview session, involving the two Finnish regional authorities, i.e. the Helsinki – Uusimaa Regional Council PP4 and the Regional Council of Kainuu PP2, took place on 6.3.2020. The interviewed persons were Jouni Ponnikas, Regional Development Director, Regional Council of Kainuu and Juha Eskelinen, Director, Regional Development, Helsinki-Uusimaa Regional Council. Another interview with Babis Kiourtsidis, Director of the Managing Authority of Western Macedonia (the MA of ANKO PP5), took place on line on 31.3.2020. These three regions represent three types of innovators according to the 2019 Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS): innovation leader (Helsinki – Uusimaa), strong innovator (Kainuu) and moderate innovator (Western Macedonia).

The issue of constructed regional advantage was accepted as relevant by both types of regions. However, for strong innovators the focus was more on new networks, commercialisation of research and expansion of the economic base, while for the moderate innovator the focus was on options to diversify traditional economy and, at the same time, ensure market placement of innovative products. Policy impact was appreciated, by the two Finnish regions, as consolidation of positive experiences and opportunity to get new insights into strategic questions such as RIS3 and introduction of new types of networks. Western Macedonia appreciated the policy impact as a long term tool for transition and diversification.

**Conclusions:** (1) cooperation between strong (leaders & strong) and less strong innovation regions seems to be relevant in at least three types of domains: a) research-to-business, b) research-to-industry and c) research-to-innovation systems; (2) strong innovation regions benefit, from income generated through knowledge and

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technology transfer; (3) research-to-industry schemes may lead to joint research, re-use of research & follow up research opportunities benefitting both types of regions increasing the specialisation base of the stronger regions; (4) the weak innovation regions (moderate and modest innovators) benefit from the scaling up effects of the knowledge and technology transfer, and proceed to modernisation & diversification; (5) The policy implications and preconditions for succeeding such collaborative schemes, are that strong innovators need to include among their RIS3 priorities commercialisation of research through internationalisation, while moderate and modest innovators need to include initiatives strengthening the absorptive capacity for innovation of their economies. Access to targeted transregional innovation partnerships as part of regions' diversification and modernisation objectives, appears to be important. In the medium run, joint programming might be an option.