



Improving Structural Funds for better delivery of R&D&i policies

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North West Regional Development
Agency

Project overview



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund



Research &
innovation



Policy instrument

The 2014-2020 Regional Operational Programme – Priority Axis 1 “Promoting technology transfer” was initially selected by NW RDA as the policy instrument to be improved within the IMPROVE project. However, two important aspects motivate the need for change:

- **A different EU set-up:** The new multiannual framework (2021-2027) being prepared at the national level, in line with EU’s priorities;
- **A different governance mechanism:** The new role that NW RDA has in the governance of the policy instrument – that of MA for the new ROP 2021-2027 for the North-West region.

In this context, there is, however, a great potential for synergies and continuation of the work done so far in the IMPROVE project, given that the new Priority Axis 1 is similar in terms of target groups, but with a larger scope and wider objectives: *PA1 – A region competitive through innovation, digitalization and dynamic enterprises*. Therefore, it is a learning opportunity for NW RDA in terms of **identifying what works best and how to overcome challenges in the design, governance and implementation of similar actions** in other partner regions and what could be transferred and adopted in order to improve policies for innovation support and competitiveness at the regional level.

With the Smart Specialization Strategy of NW region (RIS3) for 2021-2027 being finalized, and the great responsibility that the new MA role poses in terms of ability to influence policies in the RDI field, there is an **additional need to explore and learn as much as possible on how to better address the competitive sectors, how to design and implement the calls and interventions, with the final goal of strengthening the maturity of the regional innovation ecosystem**.





Good practices

The new ROP 2021-2027 allows for more flexibility and provides more instruments to be used in order to strengthen the RDI ecosystem. Therefore, some good examples that could be valuable in terms of further development in the new programming period are:

C-Voucher - Circular Value Chains in European RIS3 project, through its activities of assistance and specialized support to SMEs and cascade funding schemes, is a valuable example of how businesses could be supported to capitalize on new sectors and become more innovative. The knowledge base developed through the project provides indirect support to entrepreneurs seeking new ways of approaching the market for circular economy. **Cascade funding aiming to support priority / competitive sectors are interesting tools to be explored further and capitalized on in the future.**

Link: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5678/c-voucher-circular-value-chains-in-european-ris3/>

Support of specialization sectors through actions fostering cross-sectoral / multi-governance approaches

Cluj – Future of Work project provides good evidence of how funding dedicated mainly to municipalities (UIA – Urban Innovation Action) can help involve different typologies of stakeholders, that directly contribute to an increased dynamism and entrepreneurial activity. By bringing together clusters, universities, the municipality and NGOs, the project actions (entrepreneurship education, equipment for the creative and cultural industries, understanding how the city of Cluj-Napoca can become better prepared for automatization of work, how to better address informal work in underprivileged communities, etc.) foster innovative thinking, but also innovation and entrepreneurship support.

As ITC is a priority area in the RIS3, this sector is largely supported through the project – either by providing solutions or training, or by testing innovative solutions in the cultural and creative industries. Finally, knowledge-based intensive business services are stimulated to become more competitive and engaged in societal change.

Link: <https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/5680/cluj-future-of-work/>



Specific issues and areas of improvement

The need for an improved coordination framework between actors is one challenge that could be addressed within IMPROVE, especially given the MA role that the NW RDA would have in the upcoming programming period. With duplication and overlaps in the innovation ecosystem being more likely to occur (due to disparate, uncoordinated actions from stakeholders across the territory), there is an increasing need to better coordinate interventions along the specialization niches in order to better exploit synergies and the existing potential in the more mature sectors.

Also, the region is facing a lack of a critical mass of innovators, both public and private, and a limited tradition of collaboration between R&D institutions and the private sector. **Therefore, stimulating coordination at the priority sector / specialization niche** is a challenge for the future.

Also, in the absence of a critical mass of specialized service providers, as well as given the lack of financial capacity by most SMEs willing to engage in innovative activities, **creating the opportunities that match existing market needs with the funding and implementation mechanisms** that are more effective to produce results are highly needed.

Finally, **the monitoring and evaluation of RIS3**, especially in connection to the Policy Instrument that provides the funding, should be better considered in the 2021-2027 period. Although the NW RDA is one of the most innovative agencies in the country with respect to tools, methods and vision for smart economic development, **there is no such tool that allows for an upfront, direct, visualization of initiatives and projects funded under RIS3 priorities.**

On the one hand, it would allow for better planning and decision-making, increasing agility and reaction with respect to the market. On the other hand, it could become not only an instrument for policy-makers, but also for beneficiaries and stakeholders to promote and showcase their success stories, resources, and achievements. Ultimately, it would also contribute to **better coordination and trust among stakeholders**.



Identified solutions to specific issues

Two practices have been identified as mostly contributing to the identified challenges:

1. The **Smart Specialization Monitoring Tool** (Extremadura, Spain)

Such a tool would immediately create important synergies with the existing INNO platform, developed by the NW RDA to promote and connect stakeholders / initiatives under RIS3.

Also, it would allow for better planning based on facts and data, increasing the agency's ability to respond to better understand the market and trends.

Finally, it has a high transferability potential, although specific operational aspects should be assessed more in-depth.

2. **Management of the EDP at the S3 priority level through the setting up of steering committees** (Centre-Val de Loire, France)

This example of good practices directly responds to the challenge related to the limited coordination at the RIS3 priority level.

While some organisations that are part of the working groups can mobilize change at the regional innovation ecosystem level, their role is rather informal in relation to the RIS3.

The novelty element for the NW region and the similarities in terms of governance structures increased its attractiveness as an example to follow.



Main stakeholders involved in the project

The Regional Committee of Representatives comprises stakeholders across the region, involved in different areas of the innovation ecosystem:

- Municipalities and metropolitan areas in major urban centres: Cluj-Napoca, Oradea
- Universities (UBB, USAMV, UTCN)
- Clusters (Transylvania IT Cluster, AgroFood Cluster, Furniture Cluster)
- Research organisations (INCDTIM)
- Business support organisations (Spherik Accelerator, Tetapolis)