



Regional Innovation Ecosystems

A Policy Learning Platform event

18 October 2022

CEITEC, Brno, Czech Republic

Summary. The thematic workshop on Regional Innovation Ecosystems explored the role of regional policymakers in promoting interactions among stakeholders and in accelerating the regional innovation process. It attracted 40 participants and was organised at the Central European Institute of Technology (CEITEC) in Brno. High-level speakers from Lund University, Mid-Sweden University, Transilvania IT cluster along with a number of leading regions who shared their experiences in building successful and dynamic regional innovation ecosystems.



Highlights

The Topic:

Building effective innovation ecosystems is an important component of Horizon Europe - Pillar III Innovative Europe with **European Innovation Ecosystems (EIE)** and will add an interesting territorial dimension that will act in complementarity and synergy with the **European Innovation Council (EIC)** and the **European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT)**.

Through **Horizon Europe and other EU funding programmes**, the EU aims to create more connected and efficient innovation ecosystems to support the scaling of companies, encourage innovation and stimulate cooperation among national, regional, and local innovation actors to create joint action plans.

Through presentations of concrete cases and interactive working group sessions, the workshop explored regional policy tools to favour the acceleration of the innovation process and the promotion of interactions among regional innovation actors and across regional innovation ecosystems to build effective innovation ecosystems.

The Insights:

Regional innovation ecosystems must constantly adapt to new policy directionalities. Regional innovation policies are increasingly geared towards solving **place-based societal challenges** that can be drivers for better innovation and help give a direction to regional innovation strategies. Societal challenges can support aligning stakeholders around a common vision and missions and can increase potential for radical innovation and structural change. Through missions, regions can experiment new integrated policies to find innovative solutions to societal challenges. For instance, the **Province of Zuid-Holland (NL)** underwent a policy shift to address the digital and twin transitions. Other policy examples were shared such as mapping stakeholders in the maritime sector, frugal innovation for SMEs, and building interregional value chains (see Province of Zuid-Holland presentation).

Innovation models and collaborative approaches can be drivers of change for regional innovation ecosystems. They must increasingly be based on open collaborative models—see figure 1. In this ecosystem approach, there is the need for **orchestrators** such as the example of the innovation platform **Future by Lund**, to apply collaborative and innovation models, to drive dialogue for change, to identify cross-innovation opportunities and to mobilise stakeholders from different organisations but sharing the same vision.

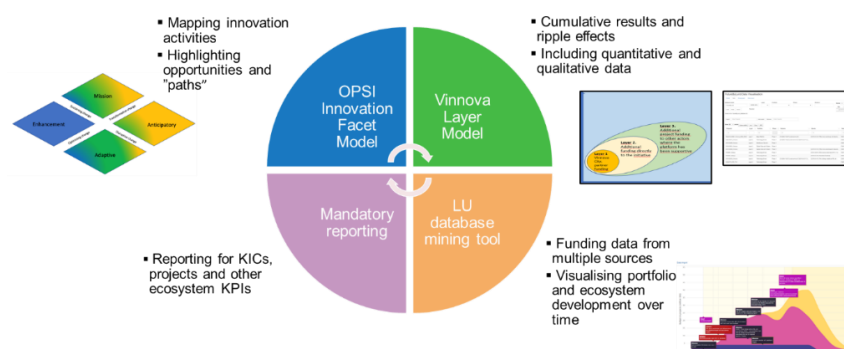


Figure 1. Applying innovation and collaborative models for regional transformation. Source: Charlotte Lorentz Hjorth, Lund University.

The policy tools:



Policy makers can develop tools to support innovation ecosystems in their territories. The examples below were shared by the participants during the working groups discussions.

- There is an important role for **intermediary organisations** (e.g. clusters) to connect their regional innovation ecosystems and actors with European policy and initiatives such as the Digital Innovation Hubs (DIH), Horizon Europe, Urban Innovative Actions. The Transilvania IT Cluster (RO) is an interesting example in this sense, taking an active role in its region to coordinate the initiatives among other innovation players and thus creating critical mass and higher visibility of such actions.
- It is important that regional innovation ecosystems engage more broadly the civil society to form the quadruple helix model of innovation. In Cluj, Romania, the **Centre for Civic Innovation and Imagination** was created to engage civil society to solve major urban challenges.
- In already advanced regional innovation ecosystems, there is often no need to create novel intermediary organisations due to the risk of fragmentation. In the Netherlands, policymakers are increasingly offering **funding for collaboration** to reinforce the existing players and ensure policy coordination.
- **Innovation vouchers** are tools that can support the structuration of a regional innovation ecosystem and accelerate the innovation process. The region of Central Macedonia in Greece shared how they launched **Innovation Coupons** to support SMEs. They can also be used to stimulate interregional cooperation.
- **Peer learning is not only important for policymakers but also for SMEs.** In the Netherlands, matchmaking and peer learning events are organised to support SMEs.

Good practices

Three good practices on **Building Innovation Ecosystems** were featured during the workshop:

In **BEYOND EDP**, the **Innovation Monitor** is an initiative developed through the collaboration between the University of Groningen and the Northern Netherlands Alliance (SNN) to enhance innovation policies and contribute to a more effective use of subsidies in the Northern Netherlands (NNL). The project aims to map and measure innovation activities, investments, and performance of SMEs, through the analysis of indicators-based questionnaires completed by participating companies on an annual basis. Specific reports are presented annually, providing insights into the trends of the NNL innovation ecosystem. Participating companies are provided with individual benchmark reports on their performances, as well with an overview of the most relevant subsidy instruments they can use for their business activities, thus encouraging them to participate in the survey.

In **INNOHEIS**, **Minding the gaps** illustrates a way forward for universities to have a greater impact on their regional innovation ecosystems. Universities have an important role to play to strengthen local innovation capacities through translating and brokering extra-regional knowledge to reinforce local absorptive and innovation capacities. The initiative focuses on university-municipalities collaboration to respond to local policy challenges. Mid Sweden University (MiUn) and local municipalities have signed formal agreements for strategic partnerships enabling scientific activities to be aligned with local and regional development priorities. The strategic partnerships were first signed with the two largest towns, Sundsvall and Östersund, where municipal officials were coordinating internal municipal R&D initiatives while academic researchers were adapting their research projects to respond to local challenges. The initiative offers a path towards greater impact of regional universities on their regional innovation ecosystems.

Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform Peer-reviews can give regional policymakers policy directions and policy priorities in the structuration of a regional innovation ecosystem. The Policy



Learning Platform organised an online peer review on the topic of **'promoting economic diversification and attract manufacturing industries in the health sector'** with the City of Szombathely, Hungary, in June 2021. Balázs Barta, Pannon Business Network (PBN), presented how recommendations from the peer review led to concrete actions in the structuration of the health rehabilitation sector in Szombathely, Hungary and the structuring of the regional health value chain with new interregional dimensions and high-profile regional events.



Next steps

Innovation ecosystems are always transforming and thus require continuous policy experimentations from regional governments. The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform **Good Practices database** helps you to find innovation policy solutions to building a successful innovation ecosystem. Please do not hesitate to send us a **Policy Helpdesk** request and we will give you quick access to relevant policy information and contacts. Participants can also apply for **Matchmaking sessions** and **Peer-reviews**.



Other useful materials

- Interreg Europe **Good Practices database** and respective projects webpages
- Interreg Europe **policy brief** on **Innovation Networks**
- Interreg Europe **policy brief** on **Open, Social, and Responsible Innovation**.
- Interreg Europe **policy brief** on **Regional Innovation Governance**
- Interreg Europe story on **Integrated strategies for better place-based policies**
- Interreg Europe webinar on **mission-oriented innovation policies**
- Interreg Europe workshop on **university-industry collaboration**
- **Sign up** to our **Policy Digest** in Research and Innovation.

For more information related to the workshop and the presentations, please visit the conclusions page where you will find photos, attendee lists, and all of the presentations, etc.

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