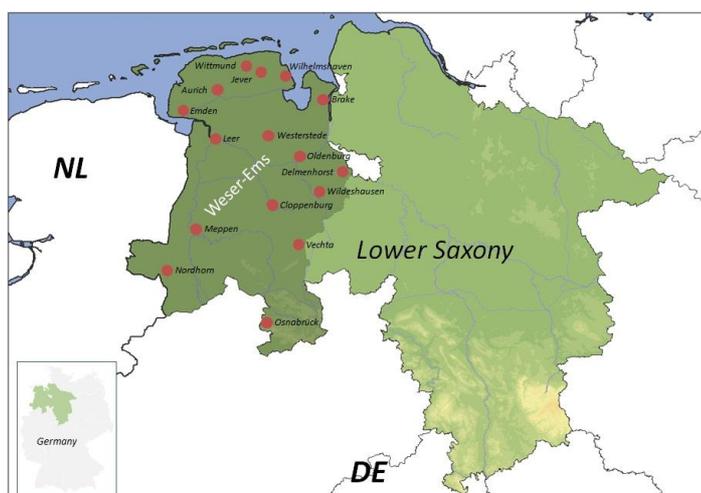


RIS3 PEER REVIEW REPORT WESER-EMS



10-11 April 2014

Peer Review Workshop, Novi Sad (Serbia)

Weser-Ems presented the current work on their Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation in the Peer Review Workshop organised by the S3 Platform and the Information Centre for Business Standardisation and Certification. The presentation was followed by peer discussions, which have provided the basis for this report.

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PART 1 | S3 PEER REVIEW APPROACH

[ABOUT THIS REPORT]

Peer Review Methodology. An important tool currently offered by the S3 Platform (European Commission) to the EU regions and Member States is its RIS3 peer review workshops. The peer review approach developed by the S3 Platform team concentrates review activities both in time and space by allowing a number of regions to be reviewed by peers from across Europe. These workshops bring together regions for mutual learning and exploration of ways in which RIS3 strategies can be developed. The S3 peer review methodology allows creating an open and trusted learning environment where practical and conceptual aspects of RIS3 can be discussed and explored through challenges and experiences of individual regions.

Participatory approach. An S3 Platform team member facilitates each peer review session in line with the participatory leadership approach. Such a participative approach encourages all participants to share or participate in the decision-making. It allows engaging participants in a dynamic and creative discussion, which benefits both the regions under review and their peers.

Objectives and expected outcomes. Regions volunteer to be reviewed in an attempt to source both critical and well-timed advice addressing specific issue areas they are currently facing in the development of their RIS3 strategies. Regions also view the peer review workshop as a good opportunity to build their networks of counterparts across Europe. The RIS3 peer review workshops aim to fulfil two main objectives. The first objective is to allow regions meet their peers (as well as the European Commission staff and experts) and to discuss common issues related to Smart Specialisation. The second objective is to allow regions to peer-review each other's work on RIS3. Peer review sessions aim to achieve the following three outcomes: (1) *to provide* methodological and practical feedback to each region under review; to *closer examine* specific issues so as to understand what these really mean; and *to discuss* practical ways to address common problems (lessons to take home).

About S3 workshops. An average S3 peer review workshop runs over two full days, and includes peer review of four regions. Individual peer review sessions focus on one region and lasts around two hours. Peer review workshops are generally organised around four individual peer review sessions focusing on four regions. A presentation of each region's current work on RIS3 is generally followed by a Q&A session, and a number of simultaneous discussions of specific issue areas highlighted during presentations. Specific issues are then discussed at individual tables in three iterations, which ensure that participants can: (1) *work together* to understand the actual problem behind each issue; (2) *propose solutions* to these problems by discussing what worked well (good practices) and what did not work; and (3) *learn together* how to deal with new policy issues in new contexts.

Structure. The S3 peer review process generally includes three phases: preparation, workshop discussions, and the post-workshop follow-up. Prior to their workshop, each region under review is asked to prepare two documents describing region's socio-economic and political background, as well as its research and

innovation system. These documents outline pre-selected priorities and specific questions to guide and focus further discussions. Each reviewed region carries out a comprehensive self-assessment of its current work on RIS3. This assessment covers nine principal areas: stakeholder engagement, analytical work behind RIS3, a shared vision, priorities, an action plan, a policy mix, the outward-looking dimension, synergies between policies and funding sources, and a convergence and monitoring system. This assessment exercise allows regional authorities to examine their region's smart specialisation strategy from a perspective of an external expert.

Structured Feedback. Peer-review sessions are followed by a final session during which all participants (experts, representatives of the regions under review and peers) summarise the results of four peer-review sessions, and discuss individual and mutually learnt lessons. The regions under review are at this point provided with the opportunity to respond to any feedback collected throughout the workshop. They then share with peers their new lessons, as well as any short- to mid-term plans to implement these lessons. During the workshop, the S3 Platform team members collect any relevant information and data covering different elements of each region's peer review exercise. To ensure regions under review receive adequate feedback from their peers, the S3 Platform employs a newly developed approach to the analysis of outcomes associated with individual peer review session. This data triangulation is based on dedicated evaluation forms, which are completed by three groups of participants: regions under review, their critical buddies, and experts. Based on the feedback from three groups of participants (see Table 1), the S3 Platform team further develops summary/feedback reports.

Table 1: Feedback structure

Elements	Description
Regions under review	Following its peer review session (presentation and discussions), each region under review completes a short evaluation form to take the results of discussions in their session to a level up. Representatives of these regions are also asked to list three specific actions that could be undertaken in their region to further improve their RIS3. Regions are then additionally asked to indicate which specific steps they are likely to follow in order to implement any learnt lessons and related conclusions.
Experts	A number of experts attend each session and provide comments to regions under review using a dedicated evaluation form which they fill in based on the information provided before/during the workshop. Experts are also encouraged to offer suggestions to regions under peer review and to share any relevant good practices.

PART 2 | CURRENT WORK ON RIS 3

[PRESENTATION OF WESER-EMS]

REGION'S BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION ON THE WORK ON RIS3

Weser-Ems is a NUTS-II region with very limited legal powers in the field of research and innovation and no formal institutions for the respective policy-making. It comprises 12 administrative districts and 5 cities and is situated in the federal state Lower-Saxony in Northern Germany.

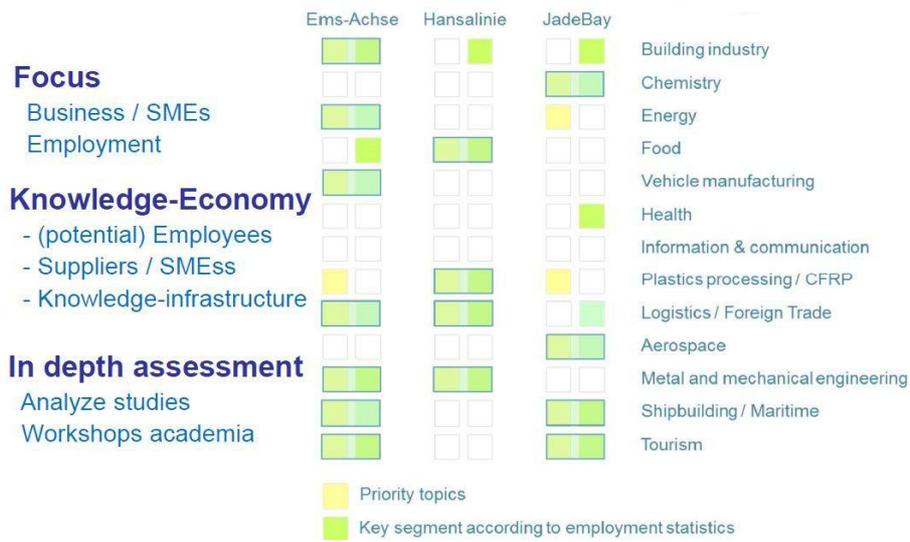
Instead of having formalised governance mechanisms, districts and cities are working together on a voluntary basis and have built an assembly at NUTS-II level to steer R&I policy. The region started as early as around 2005 to intensify work on regional innovation, building on their first strategy efforts in the mid-1990s.

Even before the federal state Lower-Saxony started its work on an innovation strategy for smart specialisation (RIS3), Weser-Ems took the initiative and defined the region as a "rural region on its way to knowledge economy". Out of the priorities that had been identified by the sub-regions, only those were kept which proved to be relevant for at least two-thirds of the sub-regions. This elimination process followed 3 criteria (see figure below): (1) employment shares, (2) business needs of supplier networks and SMEs, and (3) knowledge infrastructure.

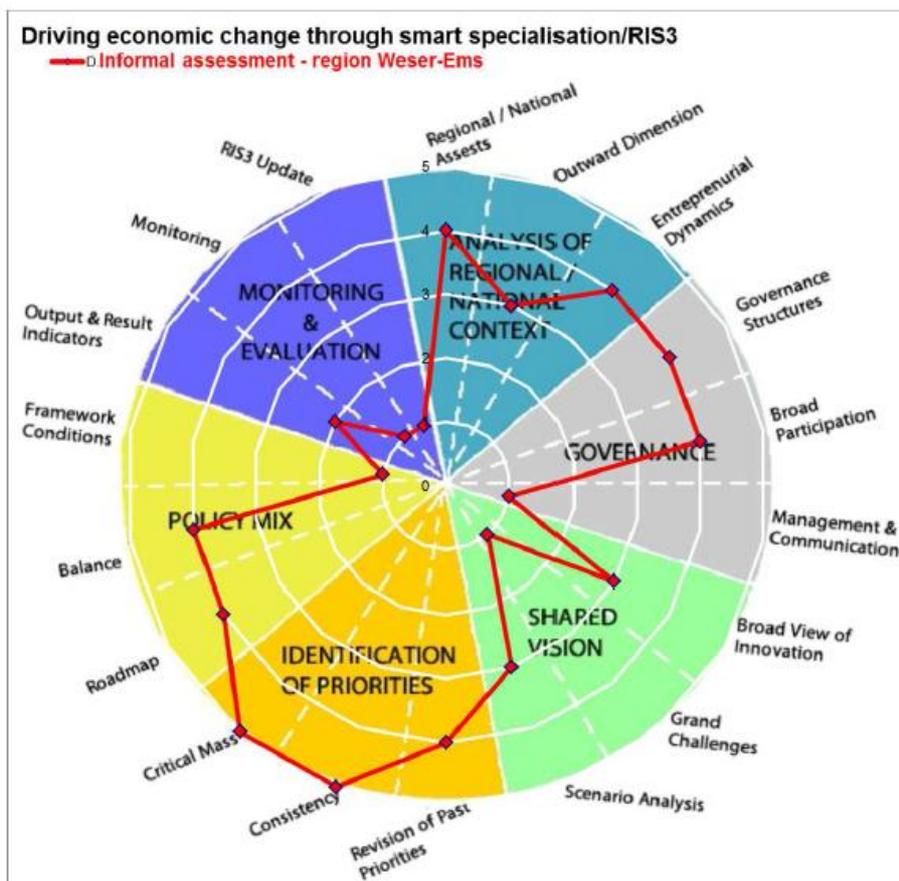
A sample of 35 firms was actively engaged in this process via interviews and experts and scientists were consulted. In the end, 3 broad priority areas (fields of competence) were chosen after going through an intensive discussion process: bio-economy, energy and maritime economy. Three strategy councils have been built accordingly and are responsible for each of these fields of competence.

In this lengthy and difficult process, making choices and achieving consensus among all relevant stakeholders were the main critical success factors.

Figure: Elements of priority setting in Weser-Ems and its sub-regions



Weser-Ems' self-assessment



PART 3 | QUESTIONS UNDER REVIEW

QUESTIONS/ISSUES FOR PEER DISCUSSION

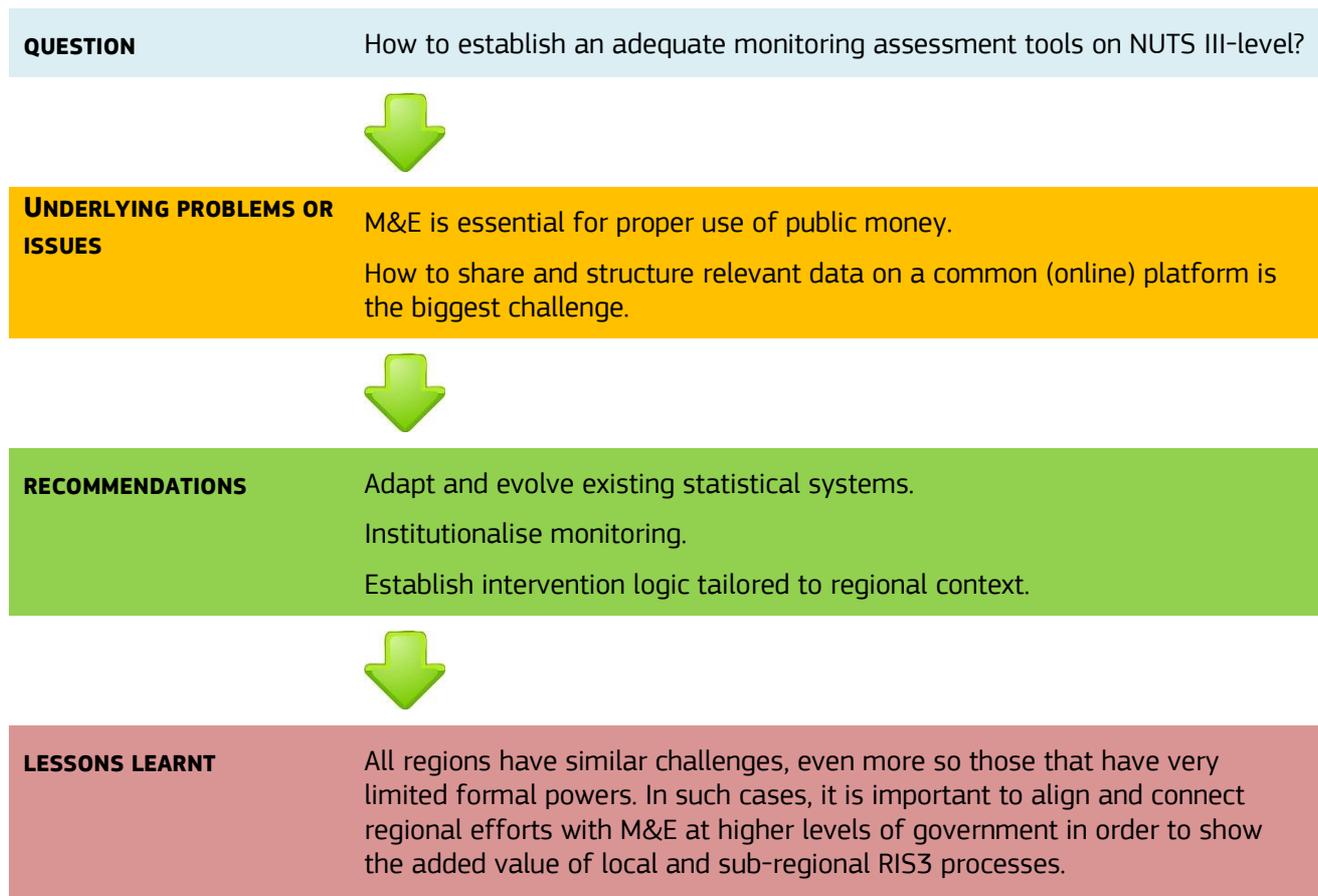
QUESTION 1 How to establish an adequate monitoring assessment tools on NUTS III-level?

QUESTION 2 How to promote the internationalisation of clusters?

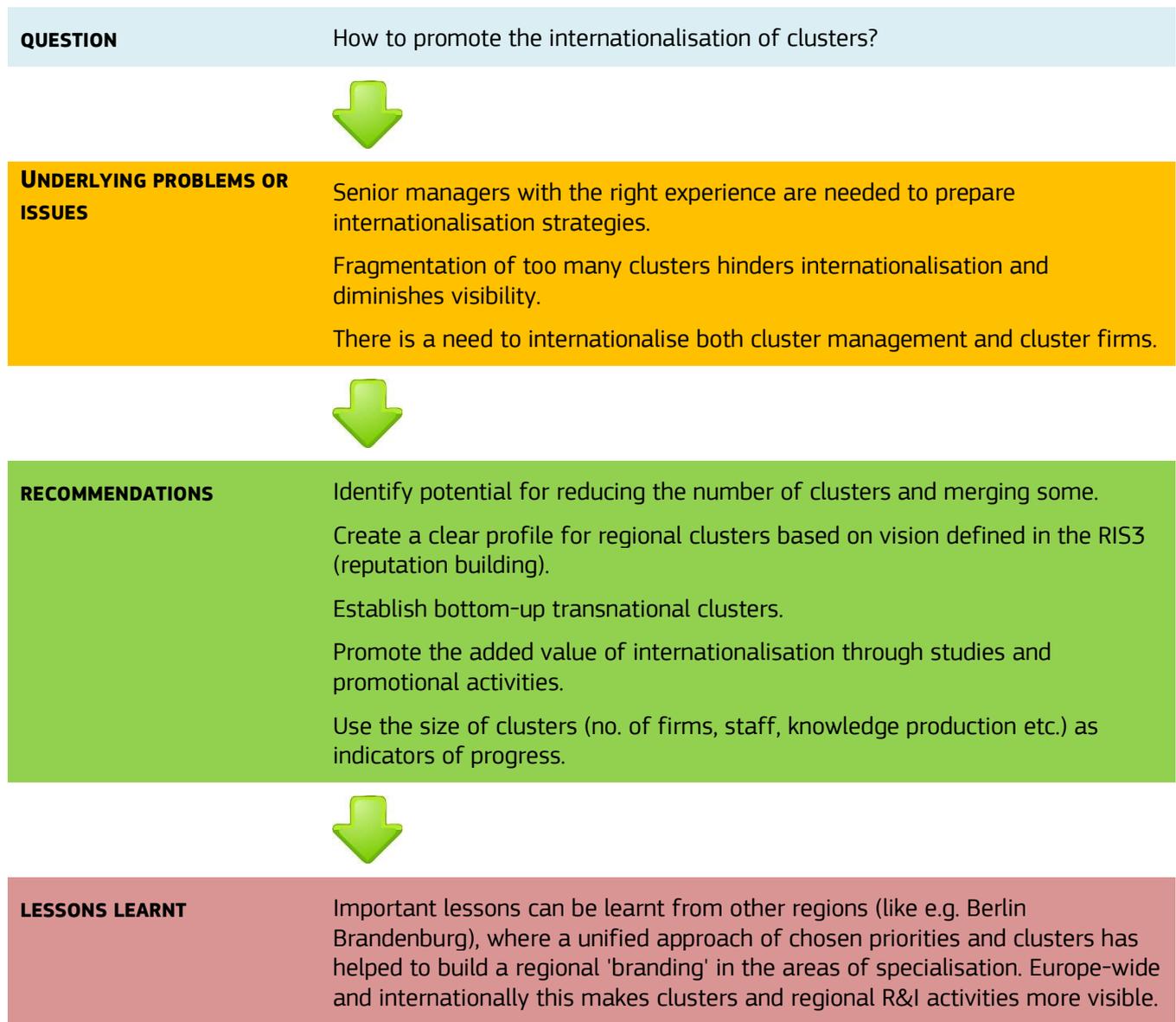
QUESTION 3 How to improve participation of SMEs in EU research programmes?

A summary of discussions around these questions is presented in the following sub-sections.

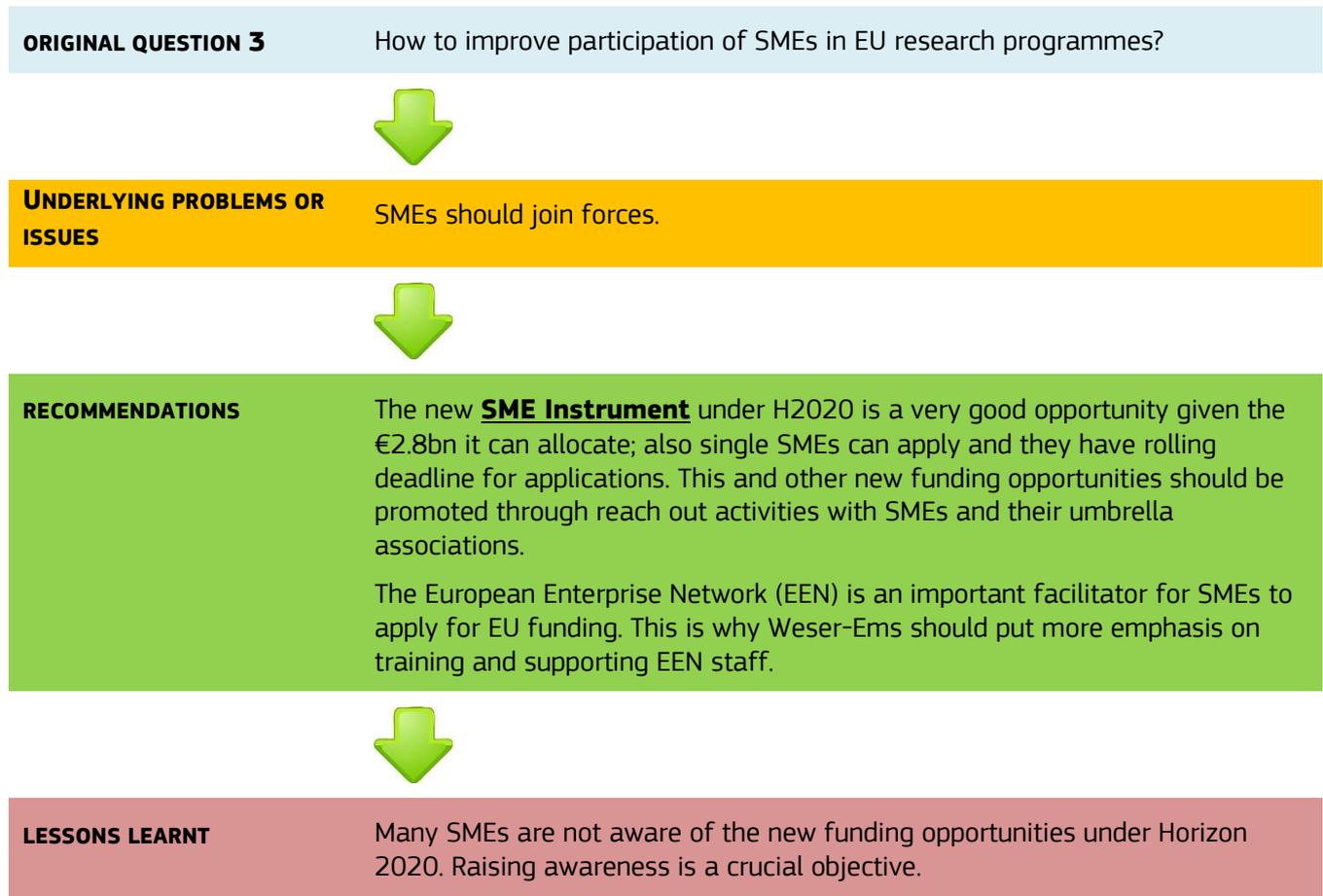
EVOLUTION OF QUESTION 1: MONITORING AT NUTS III LEVEL



EVOLUTION OF QUESTION 2: INTERNATIONALISING CLUSTERS



EVOLUTION OF QUESTION 3: SME PARTICIPATION IN EU PROGRAMMES



PART 4 | ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

FEEDBACK FROM SELECTED PEERS AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Most participants perceived Weser-Ems as a very good practice example for comprehensive analysis and priority setting. The long and exhausting path towards reaching wide consensus shows that it is important to start the RIS3 process as early as possible. At the same time, Weser-Ems exemplifies that regional actors can become active even without having formal powers in R&I decision-making.

Many regions in the EU have been voluntarily designing RIS3. For them, it is noteworthy to understand how the very participatory and strongly evidence-based strategy process turned out to be successful and even faster than at the higher level of government where formal powers reside. It is this potential for regional mobilisation and R&I avant-garde that highlights how bottom-up processes can be steered and organised.

PART 5 | LESSONS AND ACTIONS

Weser-Ems is likely to implement suggestions collected during the peer review workshop. More precisely, Weser-Ems identified 2 main lessons learnt and 2 short and medium term actions:

Lesson learnt 1:	Use existing networks to promote internationalisation of clusters
Short and medium term action:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Define general basic criteria for promising clusters 2. Profiling of existing clusters (structure, critical mass) 3. Identify European regions with similar portfolio of fields of competence 4. Organise matchmaking activities 5. Develop and coordinate internationalisation activities / strategies
Responsible body:	Coordination group in cooperation with Strategy Councils

Lesson learnt 2:	SMEs need assistance and guidance to really benefit from RIS3
Short and medium term action:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set up a regional master plan for each field of competence 2. Involve intermediates / knowledge hubs to distribute / communicate master plans 3. Implement support schemes (consultancy, finance) to assist SMEs in implementations of RIS3
Responsible body:	Strategy Councils

ANNEX | FEEDBACK ON THE FORMAT OF THE WORKSHOP

Since this was the first peer review workshop in a non-EU country and the first part of the DANUBE-INCO.net project, it was important to collect feedback on the format of the workshop. Since Western Balkans and Danube countries vary very strongly in terms of their innovation systems and capacities and face very particular challenges, the standard peer review method might have to be modified. In the following, we present the main recommendations voiced by participants after the workshop.

- Place a good practice presentation at the beginning of the workshop as a benchmark (ideally from a region or country with similar structures/challenges).
- Give more comprehensive introduction to RIS3 at the beginning (also mentioning useful tools and indicators like e.g. UNU MERIT indicators, Eye@RIS3, benchmarking tools etc.).
- Organise more in-depth thematic follow-up workshop.
- Create online blog to continue discussion and exchange feedback.
- Establish stricter deadlines for all documents to be sent before the workshop; restrict any further changes to documents after that. This facilitates a proper preparation for the workshop.
- Organise structure to support follow-up of peer review workshop and action plans for RIS3 implementation.
- Organise annual event (forum) for regions to exchange experiences.