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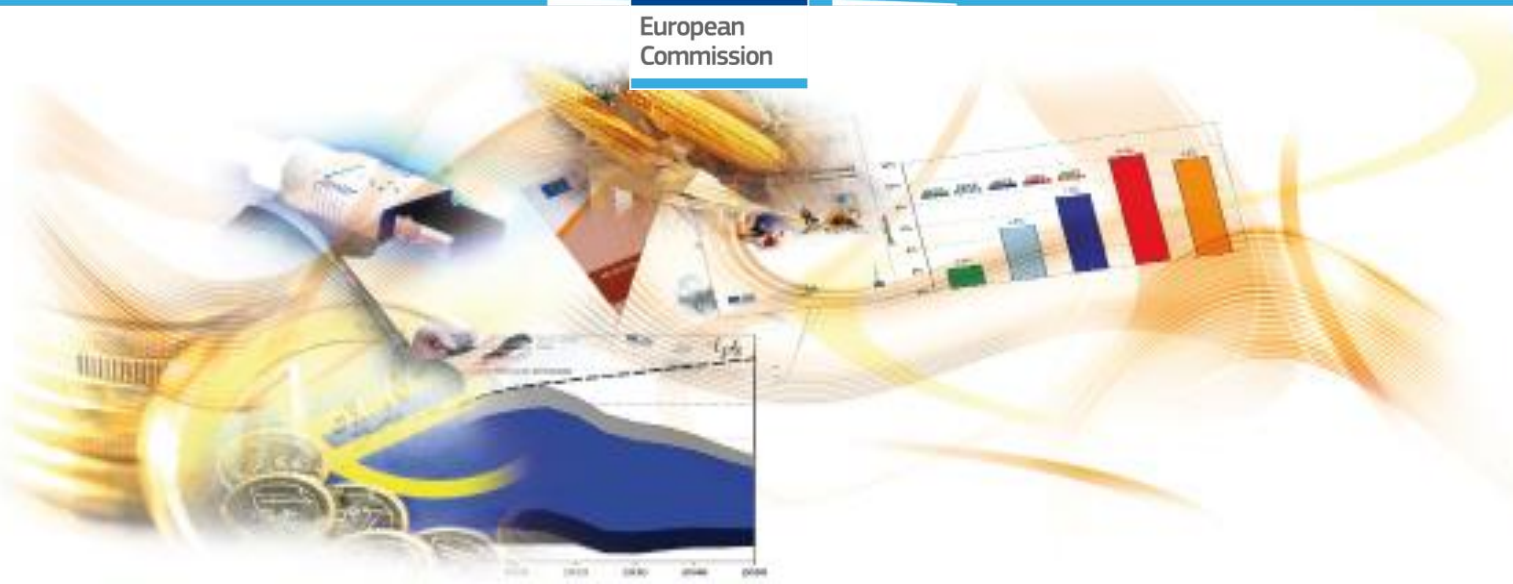

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The S3 Platform Peer Review Methodology

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Inger Midtkandal and Ruslan Rakhmatullin

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The S3 Platform Peer Review Methodology

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Abstract

The Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform was established by the European Commission in 2011 to help European regions to define their R&I strategies based on the principle of smart specialisation. This principle suggests that each region can identify its strongest assets and R&I potential so that it can then focus its efforts and resources on a limited number of priorities where it can really develop excellence. Being able to position one's region among other regions is seen as a pre-condition to being able to choose reasonable areas for competitive and sustainable growth.

One important collaborative tool developed by the S3 Platform to assist its member regions and Member States in this task is peer review. The S3 Platform views peer review as an important mutual learning and knowledge dissemination channel. The S3 peer review methodology was first developed and employed in 2012, yet it is being continuously improved and adapted to ensure the S3 Platform offers regions and Member States a framework that is structured enough to ensure regions under review receive adequate feedback, yet sufficiently flexible to facilitate open and productive discussions.

While the European Commission uses peer reviews as a tool at a Member State level in a number of policy areas for some time now, it still appears to be an under-documented phenomenon in the regional policymaking context. This paper addresses this gap by documenting the newly developed S3 Platform peer review methodology.

[a] The views expressed are purely those of the author and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

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Introduction

The Smart Specialisation[1] (S3) Platform was established by the European Commission in June 2011 at its IPTS[2] Joint Research Centre in Seville, Spain. The European Commission strongly encourages European regions to join its Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform which was set up to assist EU Member States and regions to develop, implement and review Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3).

Being able to position one's own region among other regions and countries is seen as a pre-condition to being able to choose reasonable areas for competitive and sustainable growth. The concept of smart specialisation pays particular attention to the importance of the so-called *'outward-looking dimension*' that implies a need for a continuous analysis of where the region stands in relation to other regions.

Many of today's collaborative practices are based on knowledge factors such as creation, sharing, exchanging and integrating knowledge. One such collaborative tool offered by the S3 Platform is peer review. The developed peer review methodology views *peer review* as a mutual learning and knowledge dissemination channel. These peer review workshops focus on a number of objectives. One objective is to allow regions meet their peers, the European Commission staff, academic experts and others to discuss common issues related to Smart Specialisation. The second objective is to allow regions to peer review each other's work on RIS3.

The peer review approach developed by the S3 Platform offers a methodological framework that is structured enough to ensure regions under review receive adequate feedback, yet sufficiently flexible to facilitate open and productive discussions. The presented S3 peer review methodology continues to evolve over time, with new incremental elements being introduced from one workshop to another.

The S3 Platform aims to create 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. The S3 peer-review workshops allow regions to come together for mutual learning and exploration of the ways in which RIS3 strategies could be developed.

The main part of this paper focuses on a detailed description of the peer review methodology developed by the S3 Platform and applied in its workshops. It is followed by a short overview of peer review activities organised by the S3 Platform in 2012 and 2013.

[1] See http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu

[2] The Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (IPTS) is one of the seven scientific institutes of the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). For more information, see http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu

The S3 Peer Review Actors

A typical S3 peer-review is organised in three phases: (1) preparations before the peer review workshop, (2) the workshop itself, including a number of plenary and (2.a) parallel sessions, and (3) a formal follow-up after the workshop. Each workshop involves seven main categories of actors. These categories are briefly described below.

Participants from regions under peer review. Ideally 3-5 representatives from the region or Member State are invited to represent their region under review at the workshop. On average, four regions undergo peer-review at each S3P workshop.

Critical friends. All peers at the workshop have the role of a critical friend. The region being reviewed in one session will act as a critical friend in the next session. Prior to a peer-review workshop, the S3P team provide all critical friends registered for the workshop with the prepared documents to allow them to prepare for the workshop. They act as peers and share their different knowledge and experience. Critical friends are at the heart of each peer review session.

Critical buddies. Prior to peer review workshops, the S3 Platform team approaches a sub-group of carefully selected peers ('critical buddies'). This group of peers are asked to provide additional and structured feedback to regions under review.

Invited experts. During the plenary part of the peer review workshop, invited experts generally contribute by delivering presentations on relevant topics. These experts also attend peer-review sessions and offer their expert advice, recommendations and comments. During the peer review sessions, experts act as peers alongside everyone else. They are also asked to share their expert advice and general reflection in the workshop closing session.

S3 Platform personnel. Together with a host region, the S3 Platform members of staff are responsible for the organisation of peer-review workshops. The S3P staff moderate peer-review sessions and assist peer-reviewed regions throughout the entire peer review process. They are further responsible for the preparation of a feedback report for each region under review following each workshop.

S3 Contact Persons. Each region under review is generally assigned one contact person from the members of S3 Platform staff. These contact persons are there to assist regions in the preparation of their presentation, offer guidance during the workshop and finally, to prepare a feedback report for the region.

Representatives of other European Commission DGs and services. These participants generally deliver presentations focusing on the latest updates regarding different legislative issues, as well as expectations and negotiations on issues related to RIS3. During peer-review sessions, representatives of EC are expected to contribute to discussions in the capacity of 'critical friends'.

Three Phases of the S3 Peer Review Approach

The RIS3 peer-review process progresses through three phases: (I) preparation, (II) workshop discussions, and (III) the post-workshop follow-up.

Phase I – Preparation

For additional support throughout the whole peer-review process, each region under review is assigned a contact person from the S3 Platform (European Commission). This contact person assists the region in preparing their presentation for the workshop, offers guidance during the workshop and is also responsible for the preparation of a final feedback report.

Peer Review Inputs

To ensure that all workshop participants are able to provide sufficient and adequate feedback to the representatives of each reviewed region, each such region is asked to prepare three documents prior to these events. The first two documents prepared by each region under review (a PowerPoint presentation and a background document) are then shared among the workshop participants prior to the workshop.

Input One – PowerPoint presentation

Each region to be peer-reviewed is asked to prepare its presentation based on a PowerPoint template provided by the S3 Platform team (*see* an example of such template in *Annex 1*). This template generally follows the structure of the *RIS3 Guide to Smart Specialisation*[3]. The template allows policymakers from each region under review to focus on the elements that illustrate best how their region chose to approach each of the six steps discussed in the RIS3 Guide.

Regions under review are advised to examine examples[4] of such PowerPoint presentations prepared and presented at earlier workshops by other European regions and Member States. The template encourages the regions under review to present their priorities and allows them to select specific topics to focus discussions in their workshop sessions. The so-called *self-assessment wheel*[5] is included in the template and allows regions under review to self-assess their own performance regarding each of the six steps. Most slides in this template come with an accompanying notes section providing further details and recommendation to guide each region's presentation.

In their PowerPoint presentation, each region under review is asked to list three to five questions/issues that they would like to discuss with their peers during their peer review session. Setting the focus of each presentation from the very beginning

[3] The latest version of the RIS3 Guide: http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3pguide
[4] Existing examples of such presentations are available here: http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/peer-review
[5] Further information about the self-assessment wheel: http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ris3-assessment-wheel

allows peers to understand what is important to the region under review. It further enables the representatives of the region under review to explain their thinking behind the posed questions.

These questions are included in the presentation on individual slides, each accompanied by brief background information for each question. These slides with questions posed by the region under review are printed prior to the workshop, and distributed between discussion tables during a relevant peer review session (*see* two examples of such questions in *Annex 2*). This first (preparatory) phase is in itself an important outcome of the peer-review process as it requires each region under review to re-consider, discuss, justify and document once again their region's RIS3 prior to the peer review workshop.

Input Two – Background Information

In addition to a PowerPoint presentation, representatives of each region under peer review are asked to prepare *a concise background document* (not longer than 4-5 pages) describing their region's territorial innovation system and experience. This document allows invited peers (*critical friends*) to familiarise themselves with the socio-economic and political background of each region under peer review.

The first two documents (PowerPoint presentation and a background document) prepared are shared among all registered workshop participants prior to the workshop to ensure that all peers (critical friends) have adequate time to prepare for the discussion of all RIS3 strategies under review.

Input Three – Full Self-Assessment Questionnaire

In the weeks prior to their peer review workshop, policymakers from the regions under review develop a good overview of where their region stands in the RIS3 process and to what extent they have considered different aspects of the entire S3 strategy.

In the preparation for each peer review workshop, each region under review is asked to fill in a comprehensive self-assessment questionnaire that addresses many areas of a RIS3 approximately one week prior to their review. The form allows regional policymakers to examine their region's RIS3 from the perspective of an external expert. This self-assessment questionnaire is based on the Guidance for Expert Assessment (RIS3 Guide, Annex III). This full self-assessment evaluation form contains over 50 questions covering 9 major areas that are likely to be used to evaluate regional/national RIS3 strategies (*see Annex 3*). The areas under evaluation are stakeholder engagement, analytical work behind RIS3, shared vision, priorities, action plan, policy mix, the outward-looking dimension, synergies between policies and funding sources, and convergence and monitoring system.

Phase II – The Peer-Review Workshop

A typical peer-review workshop generally runs over two half-days and a maximum of two full days. A workshop agenda is organised around a number of plenary and parallel sessions. Generally, plenary sessions open workshops and focus on common policy issues, which might be shared by most regions attending each event, i.e. Quadruple Helix and Stakeholder Engagement (Vaasa workshop, May 2013), Green Growth (Crete Workshop, September 2013).

Parallel Peer Review Sessions

Two slots of around 2.5 hours each are allocated to peer review discussions in parallel sessions. Each session focuses on one of the four regions (Member States) under review by other European regions, countries and experts.

At least two members of the S3P team attend each such peer review session: a moderator and a region's contact person. The moderator is to moderate the session, facilitate table discussions, and to collect all relevant evaluation forms (from critical buddies, experts, and the region under review). This contact person is responsible for the preparation of a feedback report following this peer review session.

Evolving Peer Review Discussions

Each peer review session generally develops along the following logic:

1. A presentation is delivered by one or two representatives of the peer-reviewed region (*see* Input One). Each presentation lasts around 25 minutes. At the end of each such presentation, the region is asked to place a particular emphasis on the four questions they have selected for their peer discussions. Immediately after the presentation, the moderator invites peers present in the room to ask clarifying questions to the representatives from the region under review. This *questions and answers* session lasts around 10 minutes.
2. At this point, all peers in the room are asked to join one of the tables (5-8 people per table). Ideally, a representative from the region under review should be present at each table to take a full advantage of the discussions and to answer any clarifying questions.
3. Participants from the same region/country are generally asked to join different tables to ensure representatives of the same region are exposed to as many discussions as possible. Additionally, such a move allows participants to meet new counterparts from other regions from across Europe. At this point, participants at each table are invited to introduce themselves to other people at their table.
4. At this stage, the moderator distributes all *individual questions* (posed by the region under review prior to the workshop) among the 3-5 groups of participants (one question per table) in the room. The questions can be either randomly assigned by

the moderator to particular tables. Alternatively, tables can be invited to choose a question they would like to discuss.

5. The subsequent discussions at each table take about 1 hour in total and follow three iterations: (a) the question behind the question, (b) policy suggestions to the region under review, and (c) lessons to take home. These three iterations will be discussed in more detail below.
6. Once each table finishes its discussion, each group is invited to nominate one rapporteur to summarise the results of discussions at each table. These rapporteurs are then asked to briefly present these results following the logic of three iterations.
7. At the end of each peer review session, the reviewed region is invited to reflect on the presented results of the discussions.
8. Before each session is over, all critical buddies and experts are reminded to fill in their evaluation forms and to return these to a member of S3 Platform staff. These outputs are discussed in more detail below (*see* sections on Outputs 3 and 4).
9. Following the closing of their peer review session, the region under review is asked to fill in a short 2-page (*see* Output Two – Lessons Learned and Action Points). The form is to be returned to their contact person from the S3 Platform before the end of the workshop.

Facilitating Peer Review Session

The S3P team members facilitate parallel peer review sessions in line with the traditions of the '*Participatory Leadership*' approach. This approach allows engaging workshop participants around dynamic and creative discussions that are of interest to both regions under review and their peers. Peers are encouraged to share their own experiences related to each discussed issue and to listen attentively to other participants. This approach allows all participants to understand the peer review process and to create collectively an environment that facilitates mutual learning.

The main factors facilitating mutual learning generally fall primarily into four categories: (1) value sharing, (2) level of commitment, (3) mutual trust and (4) credibility. Thus, prior to any actual peer review discussions, the objectives of each such session are to be clarified and emphasised. All participants are urged to act as critical (yet friendly) peers, and further reminded that non-participating observers might have an undesirable effect on the overall environment and the level of trust at the table.

Collecting Feedback

As mentioned earlier, all table discussions go through three specific iterations. These three iterations are represented by three different colours[6] (*see Annex 4*).

According to this logic, during the *first (yellow) iteration,* participants are asked 'to find the question behind the question'. More specifically, peers are invited to discuss the question assigned to their table aiming to better understand the problem faced by the region and to help it to narrow down the discussion. This exercise helps participants and the region under review to identify the actual problem or issue behind the posed question. In some cases, the question needs rephrasing to pinpoint more precisely the real concern of the region, while in other cases, participants need additional time to understand the issue. This step takes about 15 minutes. Once each group/table reaches an internal agreement on the '*new question behind the originally posed question*', they are invited to write it down on a large yellow post-it note (*a yellow post-it note 1*).

This phase is critical as it allows each group to establish a common understanding of a particular issue under discussion. While it is a good idea to have a representative from the region under review to be present at the table to clarify any details, this person should ensure *everyone* at the table has an opportunity to share their opinion.

During the *second (green) iteration*, peers at each table are asked to share and discuss policy suggestions within the context of the newly re-phrased question. Participants share their own experiences, informally evaluate different aspects of this issue and discuss possible options and scenarios for the region under review. Participants are encouraged to share both positive and negative experiences, as these are equally important in the context of mutual learning. About 20-25 minutes into this discussion, groups are asked to agree on a list of three most important policy suggestions. Five minutes later, they are invited to write these down on a large *green* post-it note.

During the last *(pink) iteration*, participants at each table are first asked to take a few minutes to reflect on what they personally have learned over the course of this peer review session and which specific lessons they would be taking home. A few minutes later, peers are invited to share their lessons with their groups. At this stage, the moderator asks each group to agree on three most important and relevant lessons (within the context of the question assigned to their table) to take home. After these table discussions, the results from each table are to be recorded on pink post-it notes.

Finally, the results of discussions from each table are presented to the rest of participants in this session. At this point, summaries on colour-coded post-it notes from each group/table can be attached to a whiteboard. For each question, there should be at least three colour-coded post-it notes: (a) a new question behind the original question (on yellow post-it notes), (b) three most important suggestions (on green post-it notes), and (c) three most important lessons to take home (on pink post-it notes).

[6] The three colours are selected based on the availability of coloured post-it notes (in the A5 format).

To further enrich the feedback from peers and experts attending each peer review session, the S3 Platform team applies a newly developed approach (based on the principle of data triangulation) to the analysis of the outcomes associated with individual peer review session. Additional evaluation forms are filled in by three groups of participants: the representatives of the region under review, their critical buddies, and experts.

Output One – Results of Table Discussions

As discussed above, the results of discussions at each table are to be presented (and to be attached to a whiteboard) at the end of each peer review session. For each discussed question, there are generally three colour-coded post-it notes: a new question, three relevant policy suggestions, and three lessons to take home. These summaries are collected by the S3P staff and are later to be used as an input for feedback reports (*see* an example of such summary in *Annex 5*).

Output Two – Lessons Learnt and Action Points Form

In order to take the results of the discussions to a level up, representatives of the region are asked to fill in a form summarising lessons learnt from the peer review session (*see Annex 6*). A short (2-page) questionnaire was developed by the S3 Platform team with an aim to encourage representatives of regions under review to think of lessons they learn throughout their session. In addition, they are asked to list three specific actions that could be carried out in their region to further improve their RIS3. The form further invites the region to list which specific steps they are likely to follow in order to implement these learnt lessons and related conclusions.

Output Three – An Evaluation Form for Critical Buddies

In addition to representatives of the regions under review, each peer review event is generally attended by a large number of policymakers coming from other regions and countries. These peers are known as critical friends and are expected to actively participate in the discussion of the regions under peer review during the workshop. Peers are asked to share their *friendly yet critical feedback* (hence the name 'critical friend') with the rest of participants.

In addition to critical friends, the S3 Platform has further introduced a critical buddy concept. Such *critical buddies are* asked to provide additional and structured feedback to regions under review. Prior to peer review workshops, the S3 Platform team approaches a number of carefully pre-selected peers ('critical buddies').

The S3 Platform provides each nominated *critical buddy* with a comprehensive evaluation form that they would need to fill in on the basis of available information. This evaluation form is similar to the form used for the self-assessment exercise by each region under review prior to workshops (*see Input One* above).

Not all questions can be answered based on the information included in the two documents prepared prior to the workshop (PowerPoint presentations and the background notes) or the actual presentations during the peer review sessions. Therefore, should this happen it is suggested that one should choose the 'not applicable/no information available' option for such items in the questionnaire.

This new *critical buddy* role ensures that (1) a better-structured feedback is provided to each region being peer-reviewed and that (2) more regions become more aware of the dimensions that are to be examined by experts in the assessments of the RIS3 strategies. Thus, this evaluation is an important pilot exercise that allows more policymakers to experience first-hand an evaluation process similar to the one that would be applied to assess their region' RIS3 at a later stage.

Furthermore, the use of evaluation forms allows structuring peers' questions during peer review. These forms are not shared among participants, and are only to be used by the S3 Platform members of staff responsible for feedback reports to the regions under review.

Output Four – An Evaluation Form for Experts

Each peer review workshop is attended by a number of invited experts with expertise in the field of regional innovation strategies, Smart Specialisation or other relevant themes (i.e. the Quadruple Helix, Digital Growth, or Green Growth). In their preparation for the peer review workshop, each expert is asked to examine carefully the documents that have been submitted by the regions under review.

During the actual workshop, each expert is asked to fill in a questionnaire to evaluate to the best of their knowledge the progress of each reviewed region. As with many questionnaires, not all questions can be answered based on the information provided. Should this happen, it is suggested that one should choose the *'not applicable/no information available*' option for such items in the questionnaire. This evaluation form for experts is generally similar to the ones to be filled in by the region under review (*see Input One above*) as well as the ones used by critical buddies.

This allows triangulating the results and feedback before finalising any feedback reports. The evaluation form allows guiding one in phrasing their questions during the peer review sessions. Furthermore, during the closing session at the end of each peer review workshop, all experts are asked (if applicable and relevant) to provide short recommendations to each region under review. To help experts to structure their recommendations, several additional sections are included at the end of the evaluation form.

The Closing Session: Reporting Mutual Learning Results

A (plenary) closing session at the end of each peer review workshop offers a great opportunity to invite representatives from the regions under review and experts to report the results of individual review sessions, to share their impressions from the peer-review sessions, and importantly to discuss learnt lessons, and to draw joint conclusions.
These summaries are to be guided by the forms that are filled in by these participants during and after peer review sessions (*see Outputs above*).

All workshop participants are then asked to state a few keywords that they have identified during the peer review discussions and which they would like to share with the rest of the audience. One way to visualise this joint effort is through building a shared mind-map. The final result an important analytical output as well as it is a mutual learning outcome.

Phase III – Post Workshop Follow-Up

Each peer review exercise results in a feedback report that summarises discussions, discusses any existing shortcomings in the reviewed strategy, and offers relevant recommendations. After a peer-review workshop, each region under peer-review is set to receive a feedback report. The S3 Platform team prepares these reports within a few weeks after peer review workshops.

Generally, feedback reports have been structured around the following parts:

- An explanation of the process the region under review goes through;
- An introduction of region's background. This part is based on the information collected from a range of existing sources and the documentation provided by the region (*Input Two*);
- An overview of the presentation delivered by the region under review along with any issues brought up after their presentation (*Input One*);
- A summary of the results from all table discussions (*Output One*);
- The results of data triangulation, including
    - The self-assessment (*Input Three*), as well as
    - The results of evaluation carried out by critical buddies and experts (*Output Three and Output Four*) during/after each peer review session,
    - Any additional comments from experts, critical buddies or the S3 Platform staff.
- A summary of lessons learnt prepared by the region under review (*Output Two*).

A draft feedback report is first to be sent to those experts who attended these peer review sessions for further feedback and comments. Next, the new version of it is to be shared with the peer-reviewed region for further clarifications and approval before it is shared with the rest of workshop participants. These reports are generally not available to the general public.

An Overview of Peer Review Activities in 2012-2013

The first peer-review workshop of the platform was held in January 2012 in Seville, Spain. Less than 20 regions were registered to the S3 Platform at the time, yet over 20 European regions attended this first peer review workshop. By the end of 2013, almost 150 European regions and countries[7] are registered to the S3 Platform, and almost 140 regions and countries representing 27 different Member States and two countries[8] from outside of the European Union have attended at least one workshop.

Over 55% of regions and countries have participated to more than one workshop, some to as many as 5 and 6 different workshops. At every workshop several new regions are represented from the first time, often of course these regions are located in or close to the country hosting the workshop. Even after two years and 12 workshops, the Platform is met with new requests from regions and Member States to be peer reviewed.

While the S3 peer-review workshops have been organised with the regional authorities in mind, during 2012, some representatives from national authorities started registering for the S3 peer review workshops. A number of smaller Member States expressed their interest in being peer-reviewed alongside NUTS2 regions. At that point, the S3 Platform decided to organise a workshop where four Member States would be invited to be peer-reviewed by peers from both Member States and regions. This workshop took place in Budapest in June 2013 and was organised along the same principles as other S3 peer review workshops.

Apart from the two first workshops being held at IPTS in Seville (Spain), peer review workshops are hosted by an EU region (or a Member State). This host region/country is one of the four/five regions or Member States under review at that event. These events are generally organised by the S3 Platform team in collaboration with a hosting region. A typical workshop accommodates from 50 to 70 participants (excluding any participants from the S3 Platform, and other European Commission services) in both plenary and parallel sessions.

In total, twelve workshops (organised since January 2012) have brought together an average number of 55 participants per workshop and a total number of more than 650 participants (excluding the EC staff and local non-registered participation). A total of 49 regions and countries took advantage of the opportunity to be peer-reviewed (*see Annex 7*).

[7] Regions and their Member State (national level) are counted as different entities for the purpose of this report.
[8] Norway and Serbia

Concluding Remarks

In June 2011, the European Commission launched the Smart Specialisation Platform to help European regions to define their R&I strategies based on the principle of smart specialisation. This is seen as the next logical step to reaching the goals set by the European Union in the field of research and innovation (Europe 2020 strategy). The S3 concept suggests that each region can identify its strongest assets and R&I potential so that it can then focus its efforts and resources on a limited number of priorities where it can really develop excellence. The regions are then expected to build on their competitive advantage and to compete in the global economy.

However, not every region is equally successful in developing an original regional innovation strategy for smart specialisation (RIS3). Some regions are finding it more challenging to focus on clear priorities. This is where the S3 Platform is able to provide direct assistance to regions and Member States in developing, implementing and monitoring smart specialisation strategies by providing feedback and information to Member States and regions.

The European Commission encourages its European regions to join its Smart Specialisation Platform to allow these regions to build their own communities of practice, a place where they can jointly learn about a range of common issues related to Smart Specialisation. Being able to position one's own region among other regions and countries is seen as a pre-condition to being able to choose reasonable areas for competitive and sustainable growth. Many collaborative practices are based on knowledge factors such as creation, sharing, exchanging and integrating knowledge.

One such collaborative tool offered by the S3 Platform is peer review. The developed methodology views *peer review* as a mutual learning and knowledge dissemination channel. During a peer review exercise, an EU region presents its RIS3 strategy for examination by peer regions. The peer regions are involved as equals and act as this region's 'critical friends'. Such a peer review exercise allows regions under review to examine their RIS3 strategy from the perspectives of other regions with an ultimate goal to improve its policymaking, employ best practices and follow verified standards in the R&I policy area. The outcomes of the peer review exercise are then be used to improve regional R&I policy.

The developed S3 peer review methodology offers regions and Member States a framework that is structured enough to ensure regions under review receive adequate feedback, yet sufficiently flexible to facilitate open and productive discussions. The presented methodology evolves over time, with new elements being introduced incrementally from one workshop to another. However, the described peer-review methodology has been employed to its fullest extent over the five workshops organised in the second half of 2013.

The S3 Platform aims to create an open and trusted learning environment where practical and conceptual aspects of RIS3 are explored through challenges and experiences of individual regions. As a result, the European regions and Member States generally view the S3 peer review workshops as a fitting venue for learning about the latest regional policy developments across the European Union, as well as to share knowledge, and to coordinate transnational efforts in tackling common issues.

Such transnational peer reviews have the potential to become a more important instrument available to regional policymakers as it allows them to monitor regional economic development in other countries and regions, to facilitate the exchange and collection of knowledge and information about the best regional practices and policies, and to promote the reputation and attractiveness of regional economies.

While the European Commission uses peer reviews as a tool at a Member State level in a number of policy areas (the Open Method of Co-ordination) for some time now, it still appears to be an under-documented phenomenon in the regional policymaking context. This methodological paper attempts to address this gap and by documenting the process. It is currently envisaged that a number of follow-up publications will be prepared in the coming months, with one such paper focusing on examples of peer review experiences.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: Peer Review Template. (This template was used during the 12th Peer Review Workshop in Potsdam, November)

[Your Region]: Towards a RIS3 strategy

<Please insert a map of your region>

Potsdam, 5-6 November 2013
[presenters' names]

Your expectations from the Peer Review Workshop

Please define your objectives and expectations for this Peer Review Workshop:

- How do you think you can benefit from the workshop?
- How do you think the other peers can learn from your experience? Which specific experiences would you like to share with them?

2

Questions you would like peers to discuss

- Which issues would you like to discuss and why? *(Please see also our suggestions at the end of the template)*
- Please remember that the more related the questions are to your presentation, the more likely you are to receive concise and relevant feedback.
- This slide should be repeated also at the end of your presentation!

3

Introduction of your region's work on research and innovation

- What is the status of your work on RIS3?
  - Do you have any previous experience with RIS or innovation and research policy?
  - How will past experience feed into the new RIS3?
- Will you have regional or a national RIS3 in your country? How is the coordination of RIS3 between national and regional level?
- Describe the strategic vision for the future of your region (*in one sentence*)

4

Governance

- Who coordinates the RIS3 design process in your region?
- Do you have some kind of a regional partnership? Does it include a *'triple/quadruple helix'* collaboration?
  - Who is involved, how and for what does it function?
- How are relevant actors identified, approached, included and engaged in the development of the strategy?
- Which governance mechanisms exist to facilitate an entrepreneurial process
  - How could they be built?
- How are decisions about RIS3 priorities taken?
  - Who is involved in this process and what criteria are used?

5

Building the evidence base for RIS3

- Please specify the following elements (as identified in your region's policy/strategy):
  - Strengths and main competitive advantages
  - Weaknesses and main current challenges
  - Opportunities for future regional development
  - Threats the region is facing
- Please describe the main steps of the process your region went through to identify the above elements. What kind of analysis have you carried out? You might give an overview and elaborate on the following slides covering possible steps in the process.

6

ANNEX 1: Peer Review Template (*cont.*)

Looking beyond your region's boundaries

- Does your analysis take into account the external context, national/international? How?
  - Have you assessed the positioning of your region's economic and innovation system within the EU?
  - Which techniques have been used?
  - To what extent have you considered how external knowledge can be harnessed for innovation within your region (e.g. circulation of ideas and mobility of researchers?)
- Have you assessed your region's work on Research and Innovation *vis-à-vis* other regions?
  - How has your region attempted to learn lessons from other regions?
    - Your border regions?
    - Other regions from your country?
    - Regions in other EU Member States?

7

Looking at entrepreneurial dynamics

- Assessing entrepreneurial dynamics in your region:
  - What is your understanding of the '*entrepreneurial process of discovery*'? Please provide examples in your region.
  - Are the potentials for entrepreneurial discovery being detected? How? How are they linked to priority identification?
- Involvement of entrepreneurial actors in your region:
  - How active is the business community in the development of your region's RIS3? What about research and academic institutes?
  - What are the most relevant bottlenecks to participation and collaboration? How do you envisage to deal with them?

8

Main objectives of RIS3

- Please identify the main socio-economic objectives/results you want to achieve through your RIS3
- You should try to be as specific and detailed as possible regarding objectives, i.e. "regional development" or "economic growth" are too generic!
- Please provide explanations on how these objectives have been identified:
  - Are they based on the analytical evidence collected?
  - Are they supported by clear stakeholder/societal needs?

9

Your priorities

- What are your RIS3 priorities?
- How have your RIS3 priorities been chosen? What are the main criteria used to identify priorities for investment? *Provide examples of participatory processes if any*.
- Are priorities based on the analysis of the region's strengths and weaknesses?
- Are flexibility mechanisms in place for resource allocation if priorities are eventually reinforced / discarded?

10

Digital Growth priorities

- Have you developed (*or planning to*) in your RIS3 an explicit strategic policy framework for digital growth?
- Does (or *will*) it include budgeting and prioritisation of actions through a SWOT analysis consistent with Scoreboard of the Digital Agenda for Europe?
- Have you carried out any of the following:
  - An analysis of balancing support for demand and supply of information and communication technologies (ICT)?
  - Assessment of needs to reinforce ICT capacity-building?
  - Indicators to measure progress of interventions in the field of digital literacy, skills, e-inclusion, e-accessibility, and e-health which are aligned with existing relevant sectoral national or regional strategies?

11

Why these priorities?

- Referring to the RIS3 objectives, please explain why you have chosen certain priorities; try to answer the following question:
  - "Why are the prioritised areas considered most suitable to bring about the desired results to achieve the stated objectives?"
- If possible and applicable, try to link each priority to specific objectives/results you want to achieve.

12

Implementation and budget

- How are your priorities underpinned by concrete action plans and roadmaps?
- What tools and budgets will your region use to implement its RIS3 strategy?
  - Does your region have the necessary tools and budgets to succeed with the implementation?
  - Do you include both financial and non-financial support services?
- Does the strategy and its implementation integrate and exploit the synergies between different policies and funding sources?
- Are relevant stakeholders and partners involved in the implementation stage of RIS3?
- Does your RIS3 stimulate private R&D+I investments?
- Who is responsible for the implementation?

13

Measuring progress

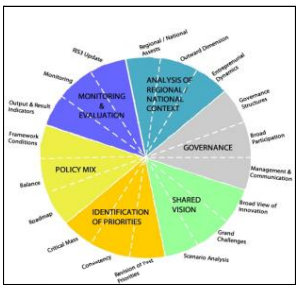
- What mechanisms are planned for monitoring and evaluation of the strategy's implementation?
- What outcome indicators do you use/plan to use to measure the success? Please try to provide an idea of the indicators that could best capture the objectives/results of your RIS3 as laid out in slide 9
- Do you foresee a review of the strategy based on your evaluation outcomes to weed out non-performing investments?

14

Your self-assessment

Please self-assess your state of preparation concerning the ex-ante conditionality using RIS3 wheel. Information and a link to the tool that will generate your wheel is available here: http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/ris3-assessment-wheel

Where are you on the different dimensions?



15

Summary and next steps

- What is needed (in the short and medium term) to develop and implement a good RIS3 in your region?
  - What are your region's main RIS3 challenges/success criteria?
  - What advice and activities would be useful to facilitate this process?
  - What support would you need?
- How aware of the processes and supportive are your politicians, the regional/national administrations, the business community in your region, your national government?

16

Questions you would like peers to discuss

- Which issues would you like to discuss and why?
  - Please provide a brief explanation of each question (ideally using one slide per question)
- Please remember that the more related the questions are to your presentation, the more likely you are to receive concise and relevant feedback.
- This slide should contain the same questions appearing in slide three of this template!

17

To help you identify the right and relevant friendly questions for discussion about your issues and needs, please consider the questions below – or other issues where you might need input.

- In which areas do you need new ideas, methods, operational models or know-how to get there?
  - To what extent do you have networks with regions in other countries which you consider relevant to your work on S3?
- Who would you like to work with to make these innovations?
  - Who are your equal regions, and relevant partners in future dialogues?
  - Who do you feel can benefit from your advice and ideas (based on your achievements and good practices)?
  - From which regions would you look for ideas or relevant advice?
- Are you considering to build a formal/informal network with the regions present at this workshop for discussing other issues in the future?
  - How are you planning to do that?

18

ANNEX 1: Peer Review Template (*cont.*)

Question 1: <phrase here your question>

- **Why**: <here, tell briefly why this is an important question>
- **What has been done**: <here, tell what has been done to date in your region to address this question/issue>
- **What worked**: <here, tell what worked well and how>
- **What did not work**: <here, tell us what did not work and why>

19

Question 2: <phrase here your question>

- **Why**: <here, tell briefly why this is an important question>
- **What has been done**: <here, tell what has been done to date in your region to address this question/issue>
- **What worked**: <here, tell what worked well and how>
- **What did not work**: <here, tell us what did not work and why>

20

Question 3: <phrase here your question>

- **Why**: <here, tell briefly why this is an important question>
- **What has been done**: <here, tell what has been done to date in your region to address this question/issue>
- **What worked**: <here, tell what worked well and how>
- **What did not work**: <here, tell us what did not work and why>

21

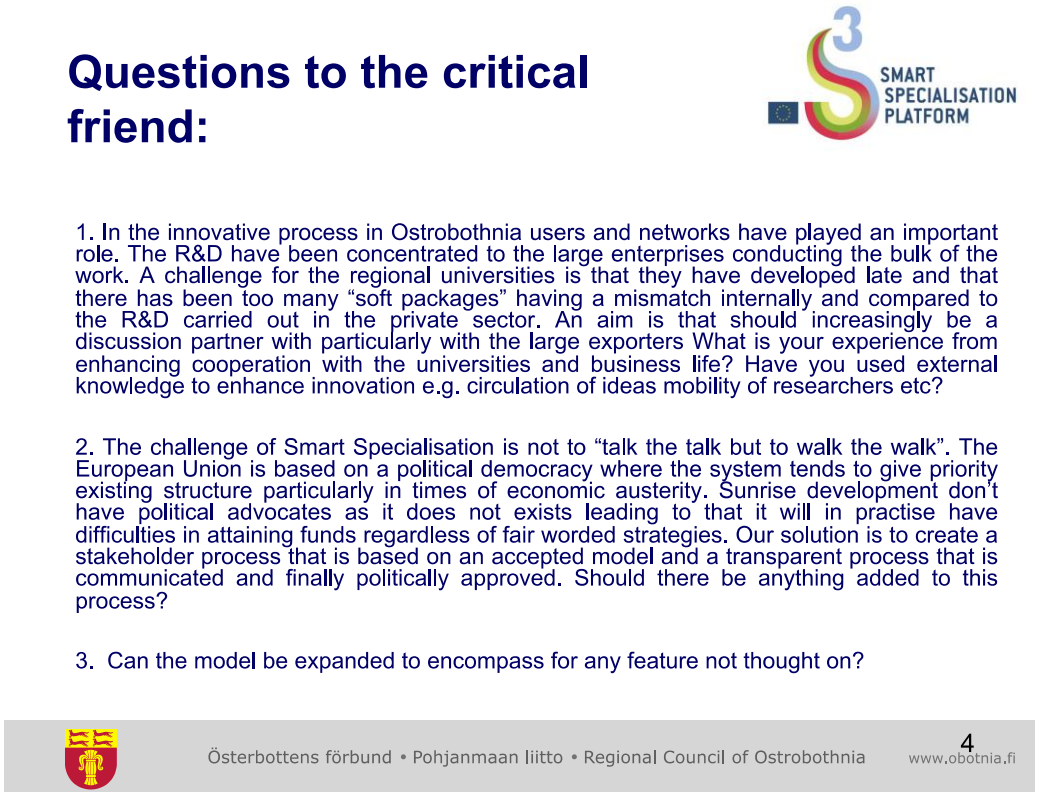
Question 4: <phrase here your question>

- **Why**: <*here*, tell briefly why this is an important question>
- **What has been done**: <*here*, tell what has been done to date in your region to address this question/issue>
- **What worked**: <*here*, tell what worked well and how>
- **What did not work**: <*here*, tell us what did not work and why>

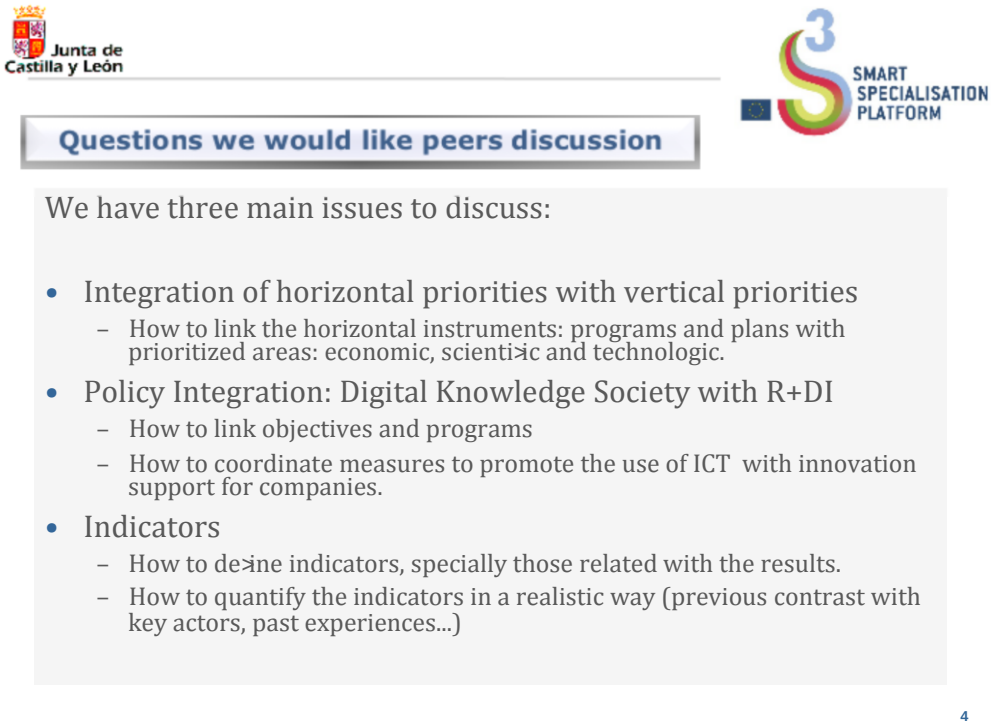
22

ANNEX 2: Examples of questions posed by regions under review

Example 1: Questions posed by the region of Ostrobothnia, Vaasa workshop, 14-15 May 2013:



Example 2: Questions posed by the region of Castile and Leon, Crete workshop, 26-27 September 2013:



ANNEX 3: A Full Assessment Form

ASSESSMENT FORM POTSDAM PEER REVIEW WORKSHOP **November 2013**

Dear Colleague, Peer or Expert,

This questionnaire is built around a number of areas which are likely to be examined in the evaluation of the regional/national RIS3. The questions are based on the Guidance for Expert Assessment which is found in Annex III of the RIS3 Guide: http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3pguide.

In relation to S3 Platform peer review, the form is used both as a self-assessment by the region under review, by experts and selected participants (critical buddies) identified in advance. Please fill in this form *during or immediately after* the peer review session you have been invited to attend.

We realise that not all questions can be answered based on the peer review session, so in this case please check the '*not applicable/no info available*' option.

This evaluation is an important pilot exercise that will allow you to understand how RIS3 will be assessed at a later stage. It will also provide valuable feedback for the region under review as they develop their strategy further.

Thank you once again for sharing your expertise and your kind interest in the peer review workshop!

The S3 Platform Team

Your name:

Your region/country:

Region reviewed:

Date:

I. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
1.1	The strategy has been developed through a broadly-based process of direct stakeholder involvement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.2	This stakeholder engagement process is adequately described in the strategy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.3	There is an identified leader of the RIS3 process in this region.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.4	In order to ensure that all stakeholders own and share the strategy do governance schemes allow for collaborative leadership with no fixed hierarchies and more flexible mechanisms.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.5	The governance structure has a dedicated Steering Group/Knowledge Leadership Group, a Management Team, Working groups, and flagship projects.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.6	The priority-setting in the strategy based on an identification of market opportunities/economic potential informed by an entrepreneurial search/discovery process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ANNEX 3: A Full Assessment Form (*cont.*)

ASSESSMENT FORM POTSDAM PEER REVIEW WORKSHOP **November 2013**

II-A. Analytical Work Behind RIS3

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
2.1	The strategy includes/builds on a sound analysis of the region's existing situation with regard to scientific/technological and economic specialisations or refers to such an analysis/related studies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.2	The strategy is based on a sound assessment of the competitive assets of the region, including an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses and bottlenecks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.3	The adopted view of innovation wide enough to cover many fields at many levels … not just hard-core technologies, not just high-tech industries, but also social, ecological, and service innovation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.4	In addition to a SWOT analysis, *other quantitative and qualitative methods* have informed the strategy (e.g. cluster analysis, value chain analysis, peer review, foresight).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

II-B. Shared Vision

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
2.5	The presented strategy offers a vision for the region.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.6	This vision is clearly described.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2.7	This vision is credible and realistic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

III. Priorities

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
3.1	The strategy outlines *a limited set* of innovation and knowledge-based development priorities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.2	These priorities are sufficiently specific in identifying existing/potential niches for smart specialisation and related upgrading of existing activities or potential future activities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.3	The thematic priorities chosen in the strategy reflect the description and analysis of the regional economic structure, competences and skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.4	In addition to technological or sectoral priorities, the strategy pays attention to horizontal-type of priorities, e.g. the diffusion of Key Enabling Technologies, or social and organizational innovations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3.5	The strategy takes into account considerations of achieving critical mass and/or critical potential in the priority areas selected	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ANNEX 3: A Full Assessment Form (*cont.*)

ASSESSMENT FORM POTSDAM PEER REVIEW WORKSHOP **November 2013**

IV-A. ACTION PLAN

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
4.1	The presented strategy includes action lines and/or realistic roadmaps in line with the objectives.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.2	The strategy indicates which bodies are responsible for the implementation of these action lines/roadmaps.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

IV-B. POLICY MIX

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
4.3	The strategy supports *cross-clustering*.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.4	The strategy supports *the identification of innovation opportunities* at the interface *between* different disciplines, industries and clusters.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.5	The strategy supports *entrepreneurship and the innovation capabilities of SMEs* (i.e. by facilitating the diffusion and adoption of technologies, including Key Enabling Technologies).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.6	The strategy facilitates *the improvement of demand-side* conditions and, in particular, public procurement as a driver for innovation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.7	The strategy foresees some sector-specific support services/schemes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.8	The presented strategy outlines *measures to stimulate private R&D&I investments* (i.e. through public-private partnerships).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.9	The strategy also demonstrates financial commitment of the private sector with the strategy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.10	The strategy identifies budgetary sources and presents indicative budget allocations.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4.11	The strategy includes a sufficiently balanced mix of soft innovation support services and financial instruments. It foresees an appropriate mix of grants, loans and financial engineering instruments.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

V. THE OUTWARD LOOKING DIMENSION

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
5.1	The strategy takes into account the competitive position of the region with regard to other countries and regions in the EU and beyond.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.2	The strategy fosters the *internationalisation of SMEs* and stimulates *regional clusters/initiatives* to make connections within international/global value chains.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.3	The presented strategy fosters *strategic cooperation* with other countries and regions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.4	The region under review foresees the *allocation of mainstream Structural Funds* within their Operational Programmes and/or cooperation through *INTERREG*.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5.5	Sufficient efforts are made with regard to avoiding imitation, duplication and fragmentation, in particular with regard to what is happening in neighbouring regions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ANNEX 3: A Full Assessment Form (*cont.*)

ASSESSMENT FORM POTSDAM PEER REVIEW WORKSHOP **November 2013**

VI. SYNERGIES BETWEEN POLICIES AND FUNDING SOURCES

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
6.1	The strategy and its priority-setting are complementary to national-level priorities (e.g. it is in line with the National Reform Programme).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.2	The presented strategy seems to be in synergy with national research/education policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.3	The strategy is based on inter-departmental/inter-ministerial/inter-agency coordination and cooperation covering relevant policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.4	The strategy considers research/science policies and economic development policies (but also other relevant policies such as education, employment and rural development policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.5	The strategy assesses and takes into account the existing level of policy coordination within the region.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.6	The strategy includes a framework outlining available budgetary resources for research and innovation, including clear reflection/proposal on how to exploit synergies between different European, national and regional funding sources.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.7	The strategy includes a clear proposal on how to exploit synergies between ERDF and Horizon 2020.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.8	The strategy includes a clear proposal on how to exploit other key programmes (such as ESF, EAFRD and COSME).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.9	The strategy considers both upstream and downstream actions to and from Horizon 2020, financed by Cohesion Policy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6.10	The strategy links to relevant European (ESFRI) as well as smaller national and regional partnering facilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

VII. GOVERNANCE AND MONITORING SYSTEM

Please indicate to which extent you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable or no info available*
7.1	The document identifies concrete, achievable goals.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.2	The document identifies output and result indicators and a realistic timeline for these goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.3	The region has sound governance and monitoring system in place to implement, monitor and evaluate the national/regional innovation strategy.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.4	This governance and monitoring system supports the process of continuous policy learning and adaptation (if not, some actions are foreseen to build up capabilities for that).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.5	This strategy is well communicated to stakeholders and the general public adequately and regularly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7.6	There are mechanisms for ensuring support for the strategy from critical groups and the active participation of such groups in its implementation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

ANNEX 3: A Full Assessment Form (*cont.*)

8.1. Do you have *any suggestions* for the region under review as to how it could improve its strategy? *What needs to be changed or improved?*

Your comments:

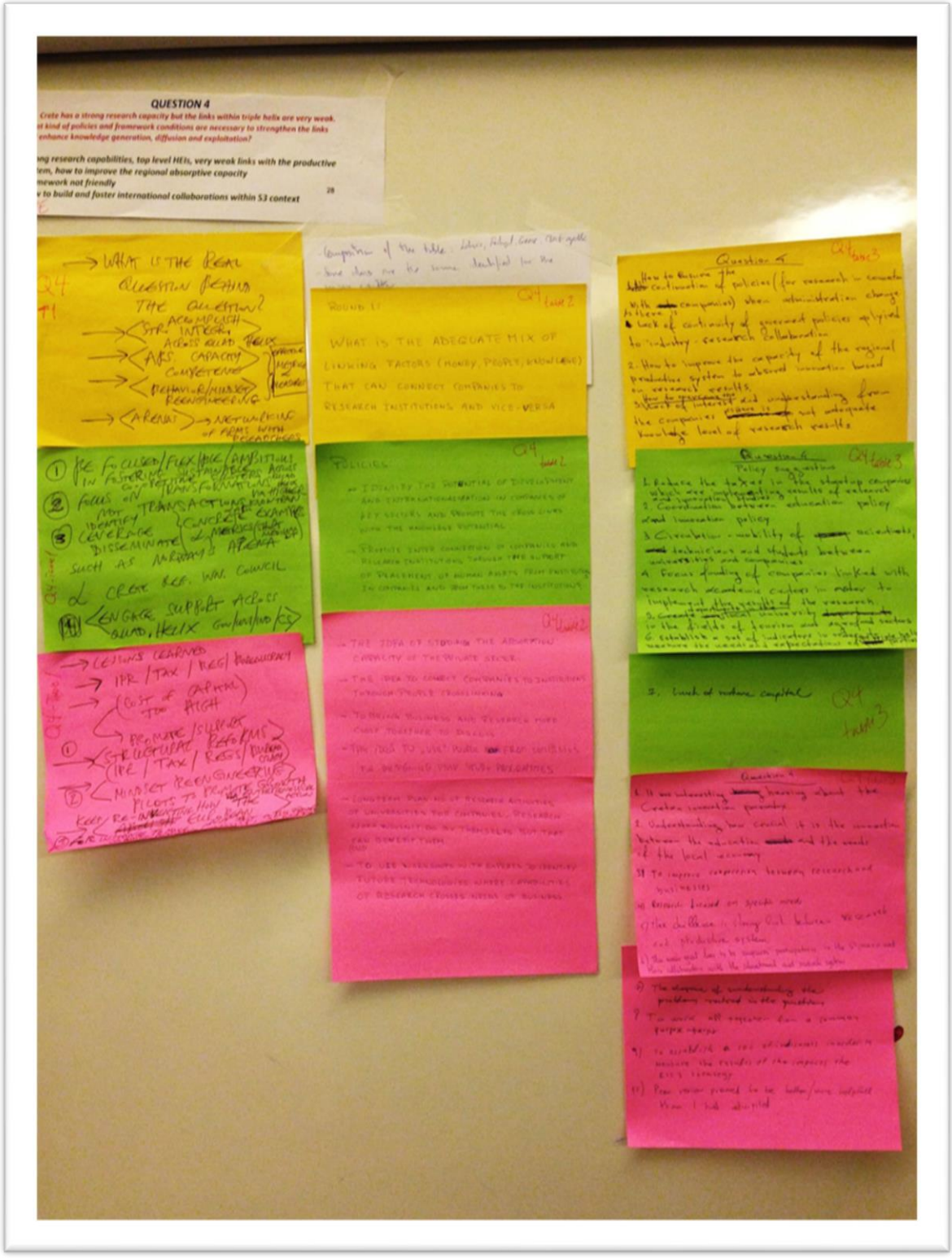
8.2 *Following up on your suggestions above* (question 8.1), are you aware of *any good practices* that the region under review should examine?

Your comments:

ANNEX 4: Table discussions in three rounds

10-15 min	Table discussion – Round 1 What is the question behind the question posed by the Region?
20-30 min	Table discussion – Round 2 **Policy suggestions for how this new question could be addressed**
10-15 min	Table discussions – Round 3 **Lessons to take home for each region/country at each table**

ANNEX 5: An example of a discussion summary (based on 3-round discussions)



ANNEX 6: Output Two (Lessons Learnt and Action Points) Form

Dear Colleague,

Thank you once again for participating in the peer-review workshop!
We would like to ask you to *fill in this form* during (or immediately after) your region's peer review session. During the closing session on the day 2, your region will be asked to summarise what it has learnt during its review session. This template will therefore allow you to better structure your summary.
Please give the form to a member of the S3 Platform team after the workshop. We might include the points in the feedback report we will prepare for you, and then we will send the form scanned back to you by email.
We hope the workshop has been fruitful for you!

The S3 Platform Team

Your name:
Your Country / Region:
Your e-mail address:

I. LESSONS LEARNT

1. We are interested in hearing about what you think are the lessons learnt and how you will follow up on the results and recommendations from this peer review workshop. *Please use the space below to write down 3 specific action points you and your colleagues will carry out as a result of this peer review.*

Lesson Learnt 1

Your Action 1:

Responsible body 1:

Timeframe for realisation 1:

Lesson Learnt 2:

Your Action2:

Responsible body 2:

Timeframe for realisation 2:

Lesson Learnt 3

Your Action 3:

Responsible body 3:

Timeframe for realisation 3:

ANNEX 6: Output Two (Lessons Learnt and Action Points) Form (*cont.*)

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the statements below.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Not applicable*
1.1	Following this workshop, we will organise *an internal follow-up meeting* to discuss the recommendations and ideas from this peer review workshop.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.2	We are likely *to implement suggestions* from the peer review workshop.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.4	We are likely to further develop/*adjust our draft RIS3 or Implementation Plan*, and explain how the lessons learned from this workshop will be included in our region's future regional policies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
1.5	We are likely *to plan further presentations* and peer-review or benchmarking exercises through our own networks.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

II. ANY OTHER REFLECTIONS OR FEEDBACK YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

ANNEX 7: An overview of peer-review workshops (2012 – 2013)

Where and when	Total Participation	Peer-reviewed Regions
Seville, January 2012	45 peers from 20 regions/countries	Friesland (NL) Nord/Pas-de-Calais (FR) Basque Country (ES) West (RO)
Seville, May 2012	54 peers from 23 regions/countries	Northern Ireland (UK) Apulia (IT) Scania (SE) Walloon Region (BE)
Ponta Delgada, June 2012	38 peers (plus local representatives) from 20 regions/countries	Cornwall (UK) Réunion (FR) Canary Islands (ES) Azores (PT)
Pisa, September 2012	70 peers (plus local representatives) from 33 regions/countries	Tuscany (IT) Centre (FR) Satakunta (FI)
Strasbourg, December 2012	52 peers (plus local representatives) from 29 regions/countries	Alsace (FR) Attica (GR) Bratislava Region (SK) Emilia-Romagna (IT)
Palma de Mallorca, February 2013	59 peers (plus local representatives) from 31 regions/countries	Balearic Islands (ES) Lapland (FI) Marche (IT) Pomorskie (PO) Aragón (ES)
Brno, March 2013	53 peers from 23 regions/countries	Southern Moravia Region (CZ) Świętokrzyskie (PO) Wales (UK) Saxony (DE)
Vaasa, May 2013	44 peers (plus local representatives) from 20 regions/countries	Ostrobothnia (FI) Lubelskie (PO) Languedoc-Roussillon (FR) Piedmont (IT)
Budapest, June 2013 (peer review of Member States)	69 peers (plus local representatives) from 29 regions/countries	Hungary Republic of Malta Republic of Lithuania Portuguese Republic
Faro, July 2013	30 peers (plus local representatives) from 16 regions/countries	Algarve (PT) Kujawsko-Pomorskie (PO) Rhône-Alpes (FR) Sicily (IT)
Heraklion, September 2013	90 peers (plus local representatives) from 24 regions/countries	Castile and León (ES) Crete (GR) Moravian-Silesian Region (CZ) Nordland (NO) Umbria (IT)
Potsdam, November 2013	52 peers from around 10 countries	Berlin-Brandenburg (DE) Mazowieckie (PL) Greater Manchester (UK) Prague Capital Region (CZ)

European Commission
EUR 26262– Joint Research Centre – Institute for Prospective Technological Studies

Title: The S3 Platform Peer Review Methodology

Authors: Inger Midtkandal and Ruslan Rakhmatullin

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union

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Abstract
The Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform was established by the European Commission in 2011 to help European regions to define their R&I strategies based on the principle of smart specialisation. This principle suggests that each region can identify its strongest assets and R&I potential so that it can then focus its efforts and resources on a limited number of priorities where it can really develop excellence. Being able to position one's region among other regions is seen as a pre-condition to being able to choose reasonable areas for competitive and sustainable growth.

One important collaborative tool developed by the S3 Platform to assist its member regions and Member States in this task is peer review. The S3 Platform views peer review as an important mutual learning and knowledge dissemination channel. The S3 peer review methodology was first developed and employed in 2012, yet it is being continuously improved and adapted to ensure the S3 Platform offers regions and Member States a framework that is structured enough to ensure regions under review receive adequate feedback, yet sufficiently flexible to facilitate open and productive discussions.

While the European Commission uses peer reviews as a tool at a Member State level in a number of policy areas for some time now, it still appears to be an under-documented phenomenon in the regional policymaking context. This paper addresses this gap by documenting the newly developed S3 Platform peer review methodology.

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