Peer review at S3 Platform, JRC IPTS

One of the main activities and tools offered by the S3 Platform is peer review workshops. The workshops bring together regions for mutual learning and exploration of ways in which RIS3 strategies can be developed. 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 workshops have two main objectives. The first 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 methodology

The Peer Review approach employed by the S3 Platform team concentrates peer review both in time and space, by allowing a large number of regions to be reviewed by peers with different experiences from across Europe. These peer-review workshops are organised with an average of around 50 participants (excluding any participants from the S3 Platform, and other EC DGs).

Workshop participants and their roles

Each workshop involves four main categories of actors.
- *Participants from regions under peer review*. On average, four regions undergo peer-review at each S3P workshop. Prior to a workshop, participants from each of these regions are asked to prepare a background document and a PowerPoint presentation (following a pre-defined template provided by the S3 Platform team). At the workshop, they deliver their presentation in a session focusing on their region. The representatives from the region are expected to engage in the discussion of their region's strategy and also to contribute with lessons learnt during the closing session of the workshop.

- *Critical friends (peers regions)*. 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. These critical friends are expected to actively participate in the discussion of the regions under peer review during the workshop.

- *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.

- *S3 Platform personnel.* Together with a host region, S3 Platform personnel are responsible for the organisation of peer-review workshops. The S3P staff moderate peer-review sessions, assist the peer reviewed regions throughout the whole peer review process and contributes to feedback reports provided to each region under peer review after peer-review workshop.

- *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'.

Phases of the peer review approach

The peer-review process can be split in three phases; preparations, the workshop itself and then post-workshop follow up. For special support through the whole peer-review process, the regions to be peer-reviewed are assigned a contact person from the S3 Platform in Seville. This contact person will assist the region in preparing the presentation, offer guidance during the workshop and finally be in charge of the feedback report.

Preparations

The region to be peer-reviewed prepares a presentation based on a PowerPoint template provided by the S3 Platform team. This template generally follows the RIS3 Guide to Smart Specialisation. The template is created to allow regions under peer-review to focus on the elements that illustrate best how the region have approached each of the six steps discussed in the RIS3 Guide. The template encourages the regions under peer-review to present their priorities and allows them to choose specific topics to focus discussions in their workshop sessions. The so-called 'self-assessment wheel' included in the template allows regions under review to self-assess their own performance regarding each of the six steps. This preparatory phase can in itself be an important outcome of the peer-review process as it requires representatives of a region under peer-review to consider, discuss, justify and document how the RIS3 strategies are developed in their region.

In addition to a PowerPoint presentation, each region under peer-review is asked to prepare a concise background document describing its innovation system. This document would allow critical friends to familiarise themselves with the region's socio-economic and political background. The documents prepared by each region under peer-review (a PowerPoint presentation and a background document per each region) are then shared among the workshop participants prior to the workshop.

During 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. Plenary sessions focus on common introductory as well as policy issues, which might be linked to the host region and country. These are later followed by two parallel peer-review sessions (around 2 hours each), during which four regions present and discuss with peers their RIS3. These parallel sessions are moderated according to a participatory leadership (PA) approach that allows engaging workshop participants in a dynamic and productive discussion which benefit both the reviewed regions and their peers. The peer-review (parallel) sessions are followed by a final plenary (closing) session during which participants (four categories of actors described above) summarise the results of peer-review sessions, discuss learnt lessons and conclusions.

Post workshop follow up of the four regions being reviewed

After a peer-review workshop, each region under peer-review receives a feedback report that is prepared by the S3 Platform team. These reports are generally structured around a summary of RIS3 related issues discussed, as well as any remarks, comments and questions raised by critical friends and experts during the peer-review session. The peer-reviewed region is invited to comment on the feedback report before it if finalized. These reports are generally not available to the general public, and shared only among the participants of each workshop.

Peer review in 2012 and 2013.

By the end of 2012, over a hundred European regions were registered to the S3 Platform, out of which more than 80 regions (from 18 different Member States) had attended at least one of the five workshops organised in 2012. An increasing number of regions have attended two, three or even four and five workshops. In 2012, a total of 19 regions took advantage of the possibility to be peer-reviewed. In 2013, a total number of six peer-review workshops will be organized for both regional and national authorities, allowing at least 25 regions or member states to be peer-reviewed.