



# Training of Trainers Workshop

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DG CONNECT and DG JRC-S3 Platform

4/4/2014

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DG CONNECT in cooperation with the Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) of the IPTS-JRC has established a group of ICT experts to help out in assessing Partnership Agreements (PA) and Operational Programmes (OP), as well as the Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) submitted by Member States (MS) and regions. The expert would evaluate whether the envisaged activities and submitted documentation fulfil the required ex ante conditionalities<sup>1</sup> and/or would assist the relevant services in the Member States/ regions to finalise the preparation of their programmes for the financing period 2014-2020.

To this end, DG CONNECT and IPTS organised a workshop to train experts in specific technical areas on how to evaluate said documents and how to face challenges and barriers in this work.

The workshop was based on the principles of Participatory Leadership but included also different presentations on the Structural funds and Digital Growth; the assessment of OPs and PAs, the available tools, the role and services of the S3 Platform and last but not least the challenges that experts have had in assessing strategies, as well as challenges experienced by regions in developing them. Moreover, there were presentations by experts that have been assessing regional work so far and what they have identified as challenging in supporting the regions.

The presentations were complemented with two participatory sessions:

1. The participants discussed the challenges in assessing PAs and OPs, and suggested different ways to improve procedures and tools.
2. The participants discussed issues related to the work of informal assessors of Digital Growth strategies in the regions.

Some of the main issues identified were:

- **Digital Agenda Assistance Assessment grid.** It was proposed to simplify the structure of the grid and make it more user-friendly by e.g. organising the questions according to their relevance. It was also proposed to organise the questions according to the RIS3 6 steps and highlight each section in a different colour to make the grid visually easy to read.
- **The Digital Agenda Toolbox.** Experts found the Digital Agenda toolbox a good tool. More effort could be put into getting the regions to use it. It was suggested to gather and provide access to international benchmarking tools, as well as advice regions on how to analyse and improve their competitive position in the value chain networks.
- **Next Generation Networks Assessment.** It was discussed how to assess the EACs related to the TO 2.2 Next generation Networks. A number of questions were raised, for example: How can one assess trans-regional cooperation plans? What is the next bandwidth uptake? How can one check cost-estimates for deployment and leverage?

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/eac\\_guidance\\_esif\\_part2\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/eac_guidance_esif_part2_en.pdf)

- **Digital Growth Assessment.** The experts concluded that the results of previous programmes, plans and measures should be a starting point for the assessment. How important is the link between regional and national plans? Are we only looking at ERDF funds? How can one assess ICT capacity? Are there sources available to look at other MSs and regions and at their strategy work?
- **The role of experts and their job description.** A number of questions were framed and answered during the discussion among them: Is there a hotline for the experts? How do we differentiate between a DG JRC contract and a private assignment? What language skills are needed? What kind of questions must an expert be able to answer? What to do if no (relevant) documents are available? What is the role of experts in short-term contracts?
- **Governance – local vs. national – European levels.** The experts identified two flows: one down-stream starting at EU level and going down to sub-regional level and an up-stream going the opposite way. The first one is about policy making and implementation while the second is about providing feedback on the policies and providing input to the policy decision-making in order to achieve efficiency and high impact. It was also said that the quality of governance and institutional set-up and policies differ from MS to MS and from region to region and therefore experts should be knowledgeable of the country governance system and institutional responsibilities.
- **How to raise awareness of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE)?** The experts agreed that all stakeholders need to be provided with information on the DAE and get involved in the definition of regional digital strategies. In order to attract stakeholders' attention it is crucial to inform them about the benefits of DAE for their business and families in a clear and understandable manner. It is also important to transfer a message on DAE objectives, and links between DAE and RIS3 in terms of priorities and instruments.

## 1. Introduction

DG CONNECT in cooperation with the Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P) of the IPTS-JRC has established a group of ICT experts to help out in assessing Partnership Agreements (PA) and Operational Programmes (OP), as well as their Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). The expert would evaluate whether these envisaged activities and submitted documentations fulfil the required ex ante conditionalities and/or assist the relevant services in the Member States/ or in individual regions in order to help them with the finalisation of their programmes for the financing period 2014-2020.

Within this context, DG CONNECT and the S3P organised a workshop to train experts on how to evaluate strategic and operational documents and address possible challenges and barriers associated with this work.

DG CONNECT and the S3P are also providing assistance to regions and Member States developing Digital Growth Strategies, by engaging an expert to review in situ ongoing work and give recommendations on how to further develop their strategies.

The Workshop took place in Brussels on 4 April 2014. 32 experts from 29 countries together with representatives from European Commission services participated. The workshop was structured around the presentations given by EC representatives and group discussions on issues relevant to Digital Growth Strategies, OPs assessment, Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE) awareness, Digital Agenda Toolbox,<sup>2</sup> the role of experts in the regions, etc.<sup>3</sup> The list is not exhaustive as unexpected themes emerged during the discussions.

The objective of this report is to provide further information on the workshop activities and convey key messages collected during the discussions. Comments and proposals on this report are welcome particularly from experts in ICT, innovation policies and regional development.

## 2. Introductory presentations

### 2.1 DG CONNECT – Introduction to the ESIF and Assessment of OPS and PAs

The Workshop was opened by Mr Hervé Dupuy, Deputy Head of Unit at DG CONNECT who provided background to the DAE and Thematic objectives 2 (TO2). Specifically, he pointed out that ICT is part of the thematic concentration of 4 TOs (TO1-TO4) on which it is possible to get funding accounting for 50-80% ERDF. In order to be eligible for ERDF funding and according to the investment envisaged, regions and/or MSs have to fulfil ex-ante conditionalities (EACs). In case of TO2, there are two EACs. The first one (TO 2.1) deals with Digital growth and requires:

- budgeting and prioritisation of actions through a SWOT or similar analysis consistent with the Scoreboard of the Digital Agenda for Europe;
- an analysis of balancing support for demand and supply of ICT should have been conducted;

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<sup>2</sup> Digital Agenda Toolbox is available at <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda> .

<sup>3</sup> Workshop presentations can be found at: <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mutual-learning> .

- indicators to measure progress of interventions in areas such as digital literacy, e-inclusion, e-accessibility, and progress of e-health within the limits of Article 168 TFEU which are aligned, where appropriate, with existing relevant sectoral Union, national or regional strategies;
- assessment of needs to reinforce ICT capacity-building.

The second conditionality (TO 2.2) requires a national or regional NGN Plan(s) which would take into account regional actions in order to reach the Union high-speed Internet access targets, focusing on areas where there is proved market failure to provide the infrastructures necessary (and at affordable cost and quality) in line with the Commission's targets.

A national or regional NGN Plan is in place that contains:

- a plan of infrastructure investments based on an economic analysis taking account of existing private and public infrastructures and planned investments;
- sustainable investment models that enhance competition and provide access to open, affordable, quality and future proof infrastructure and services;
- measures to stimulate private investment.

## **2.2 S3 Platform – Introduction to the S3 Platform, its services and smart specialisation**

In the second session the S3P presented itself, its services and briefly the concept of Smart Specialisation.

The S3P is hosted by DG Joint Research Centre's –Institute for Prospective Technology Studies in Seville. It supports regions, Member States and other Commission services in the development of Smart Specialisation Strategies. It was founded in 2011 and has currently 147 EU regions as members, 14 MS and 2 non EU regions as well.

Among the services provided are i) the development of guidance material, such as the RIS3 guide<sup>4</sup> and the Digital Agenda Toolbox;<sup>5</sup> ii) the arrangement of workshops and peer reviews to support learning and knowledge diffusion;<sup>6</sup> iii) the support to Commission services in the assessment of PAs, OPs and RIS3s; and iv) the provision experts to assess and improve strategic work to the MS and regions. S3P has developed a number of online tools, in order to support matchmaking, intelligence and benchmarking, such as the Eye@RIS3.<sup>7</sup> There is a dedicated Digital Agenda Website with updated information on issues and events related to the Digital Agenda and Smart Specialisation.<sup>8</sup> The S3P carries out research activities in the field.

A brief introduction to Smart Specialisation outlined its characteristics of a dynamic and evolutionary practice grounded in an entrepreneurial discovery process. RIS3 is about concentration of resources by developing distinctive and original areas of specialisation based on existing

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<sup>4</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3pguide>

<sup>5</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/dae-toolbox>

<sup>6</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/peer-review>

<sup>7</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3-tools>

<sup>8</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda>

strengths, not only local resources but also connecting to external resources. A RIS3 is a legal requirement for investing ERDF in R&I (Thematic Objective 1).

The presentation outlined the six steps of a RIS3 process<sup>9</sup> and challenges with regard to Digital growth issues as identified so far in the work of the platform.

- Strategy level
- Analysis
- Stakeholder involvement
- Goals/objectives
- Priorities
- Policy mix
- Monitoring<sup>10</sup>

The session was ended with a presentation on the work that the S3P does providing regions with expert assistance. The S3P offers regions the help of an expert in situ to review the work in developing Digital Growth Strategies, either as separate processes or as parts of a RIS process. They work for a maximum of ten days (including interviews with relevant stakeholders when in situ), a review of relevant written material and the summing up of the findings in a 20 page feedback report that is shared with the region and the EC. The service is primarily offered to seven countries: Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Spain. So far 5 regions have been assessed (Lodz, Burgundy, West Romania, Abruzzo, Tuscany).

The greatest challenges in the process as identified by the experts include:

- awareness of Digital growth Strategy framework and EAC TO2.1, 2.2 need to be raised both among the experts and the regions;
- the grid developed to support the assessment process might be too standardised in order to evaluate certain specific priorities;
- there is lack of availability of relevant documents (regional/national), data, etc.;
- strategies are not ONE document but a framework. It is hard to know where to look for what, regions and MS should provide links to all documents.;
- Digital Growth Strategies prepared at national level without providing examples/links to regional activities;
- fragmented ICT framework, need for alignment;
- regions poorly informed and lagging behind in preparing documents;
- regions need sector specific knowledge and understanding of advantages and disadvantages in digital strategies implementation;
- balance of expenditures, e.g. one region spends a very large share on FTTH networks;
- what is good enough to meet requirements? Is there any threshold?

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<sup>9</sup> <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3pguide>

<sup>10</sup> For more information, please see;

[http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/10157/442549/FINAL\\_presentation\\_BRX\\_April\\_2014.pdf](http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/10157/442549/FINAL_presentation_BRX_April_2014.pdf)

### **2.3 DG CONNECT- The process of Assessing OPs and PAs.**

DG REGIO is receiving a number of Partnership Agreements and Operational Programmes which are launched for Interservice Consultation. DG CONNECT set up an internal consultation mechanism to ensure that all relevant sectors are covered by all pertinent thematic objectives (1, 3, 4, 7 and 11) and of course TO 2. This emphasizes the cross-cutting role of ICT. The process of assessing the work to be carried out in the 2014-2020 also includes programmes relevant to EARDF and ESF.

## **3. Proactive Café (morning)**

In the morning session of Proactive café the workshop participants were divided in five tables which discussed the different tools and processes connected to assessing PAs, OPs and Digital Growth Strategies. The discussions focused on: 1) The RIS3 Assessment grid (checklist); 2) The Digital Agenda Toolbox; 3) Assessment of Digital Growth; 4) Assessment of Next generation Networks; and 5) Table with open questions. The participants were circulating between the tables and could participate in three different discussions.

### **3.1. RIS3 Digital Agenda Assistance Assessment grid**

The RIS3 Assessment grid (checklist) is a tool developed by DG CONNECT and S3P in order to support regions and experts to assess their Digital Strategy(ies). It consists of a number of questions structured along the lines of a Digital Growth strategy process and is similar to the Smart Specialisation process guide. The tool was discussed in three different expert groups and all of them were concerned with the following three issues: (1) qualitative vs. quantitative assessment and missing indicators, (2) check list vs. personal opinion and recommendations, (3) clearness of the Assessment grid. In the first and second cases, the experts were concerned with the expected quality of work in terms of objectivity and trustworthiness. The issues most discussed were: quality threshold, quantitative measures and subjectivity vs. objectivity; and whether the binary nature of many questions in the assessment grid is useful for an assessment across the entire proposal. Regarding the third point, the experts who were not previously familiar with the Assessment grid, found the grid too complex and hard to read and understand. They proposed therefore to simplify the grid's structure and make it more user-friendly by e.g. organising the questions according to their relevance (create chapters with subchapters or place more important questions first). It was also proposed to organise the questions according to the RIS3 6 steps and highlight each section with a different colour to make the grid visually easy to read (editor's note – the structure is already based on the steps). Finally, it was proposed to structure the questions around the thematic objectives 2.1 (digital growth: services, applications, skills, etc.) and 2.2 (infrastructure, broadband) more clearly and perhaps separate the questions which are clearly related to the EAC evaluation. The participants expressed the need for guidelines on where to find answers in OPs and strategic documents.

### **3.2. The Digital Agenda Toolbox**

At this table the participants discussed the Digital Agenda toolbox looking at how it could be improved and put to better use, as well as at different complementary measures to support regions in developing better Digital Growth strategies. In general the experts found the DAE toolbox to be a

good tool, but considered that more effort could be put into getting the regions to use it. Furthermore there could be more related tools developed to support the regions, like:

- a digital maturity model that helps identify regions in what position they are vis-à-vis fulfilment of DAE goals, and what the optimal next steps should be. As these would be different depending on the ICT maturity of a region and that for really lagging regions next steps cannot be the same as for more mature ones;
- the S3P could gather and provide access to international benchmarking tools;
- the platform could come up with suggestions on how regions could analyse their competitive position in value networks and possibly try to identify available sources of data;
- suggestions on how regions could carry out impact analysis. This could also be carried out by the Commission.

There were also a number of topics considered relevant to be included in the guide or even being subject of a different guide/tool. These suggestions had in common that the guides should be more elaborated with a step by step character for how regions could carry out activities. The suggested topics included:

- use of open source;
- cloud computing;
- data security;
- eaccessibility;
- digital services development business model;
- stakeholder engagement: more information on how business and government can work together. One of the messages heard here was that, if these actors meet, and if business is engaged in the processes, it is an indication of a good balance of supply and demand side measures;
- action planning: a desire for more information on how to achieve good practises, including more technical detail to make more robust conclusions. However less prescriptive and more enabling and explicit steps.

Additional requests were made for more training and development events such as regional DAE roadshow, information on the Toolbox, information about the experts and engagement of stakeholders.

### **3.3. Next Generation Networks Assessment**

This group discussed how to assess the EACs related to the TO 2.2 Next generation Networks. Topics that were discussed and found challenging were:

- How can one assess trans-regional cooperation plans?
- What is the next bandwidth uptake?
- Is there local capacity to provide the desired deployment goals?
- How can one check cost-estimates for deployment? Leverage?
- How can technology neutrality be maintained?
- Alignment/coherence between plans, document goals at different tiers?



### 3.4. Digital Growth Assessment

This group discussed how to assess the Ex Ante conditionalities related to the thematic objective of Digital growth. The topics that were discussed included; how important is the link between the regional and the national plan? Are we only looking at ERDF funds? How can one assess the ICT capacity? Are there sources available to look at other MS and regions and their strategy work? The suggestions that came out of the discussions were:

- the results of previous programmes, plans and measures should be a starting point for new plans/programs;
- look at the experience from other countries;
- look at the coordination between national and regional levels, national coherence (prime minister's office), interoperability; budget monitoring;
- use the check list based on the Assessment grid (DAE) including recommendations from experts and the match between assessment criteria and available documents;
- the experts could benefit from having access to a list of DG Regio desk chairs;
- one should look at the region's participation in other funds in digital growth (ESF, EAFRD, COSME, etc.);
- if there are language issues one should contact DG Regio or DG CONNECT desks;
- foresee description process of coordination and budget for reinforcing capacity at national /regional level (ICT agencies).

### 3.5. Free flow of ideas

One of the tables had no assigned theme. The suggestions which stemmed from the discussions included a request for more examples of good practises, and improved means for knowledge sharing. Some participants thought that it could be of value to support increased awareness among regions of different funding mechanisms. The importance of having national coordination in regional programming since the beginning of the process and the integration and synthesis with regional/ structural/ social/ research and innovation programmes for DAE issues were proposed.

## 4. Presentations by experts

The afternoon session was opened with a debrief of the Proactive Café session. This was followed by presentations by the five experts who had conducted assessment work in six regions. The objective of the session was to provide workshop participants with practical know-how on work in the regions, including methodology, timing, challenges and possible solutions. The presentation included information about the region(s) visited, the stage of preparation and gathering of information, the challenges and barriers they faced, solutions, suggestions and proposals and additional information when required.<sup>11</sup>

During these regional visits, a number of challenges and barriers were identified such as: data inconsistency and difficulty of accessing relevant documents; the poor involvement of regional actors in the preparation of the Digital Growth Strategy, specifically private companies; lack of

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<sup>11</sup> The presentations can be found at <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/mutual-learning>.

leadership and sector specific knowledge in the public administration as well as understaffed units dealing with Digital Growth and RIS3.; lack of an evaluation culture in the specific region, and thus unknown policy impact leading to low accountability for the implementation and public spending ;immature regional plan due to non-integrated RIS3 priorities in the Digital Strategy, and unbalanced share of public funding between infrastructure and services; the main challenge in the region was to gather relevant information and documents at the regional level and to understand the power distribution between national and local level in the field of digital growth and RIS3.

Other challenges and barriers presented can be summarised as follows:

- The most challenging issues in assessing the DGS:
  - awareness of DAS framework and EAC TO2.1, 2.2;
  - understanding of RIS3 and DGS specificities;
  - assessment and evaluation methodology of the whole DGS framework (diverse evaluation methodology for different segments of DGS);
  - availability of relevant documents (regional/national), data, etc.;
  - regions poorly informed and lacking behind in preparing documents.
- Issues that experts found critical in the regions in terms of the Digital Growth strategy development:
  - low general awareness of DAE including good practice and strategies for regional innovation and development in field of digital growth;
  - missing sector specific knowledge and understanding of advantages and disadvantages in digital strategies implemented at regional level across Europe;
  - lack of understanding of links between Digital Growth Strategy (framework) and RIS3 and combination of innovation and digital policy;
  - problematic stakeholder participation, leadership, top-down vs. bottom-up approach;
  - timeframes (regions are lacking behind in preparations);
  - there are significant differences among the regions in terms of readiness;
  - common challenge was that the experts felt that they did not entirely knew what to expect or do;
  - likewise the regions asked for other types of support than that promised;
  - misunderstandings and challenges in communication;
  - challenges with regard to Stakeholder involvement;
  - differences in maturity.

Finally, the experts presented some proposals and suggestions on how to overcome these challenges. Those were further discussed during the afternoon Proactive Café sessions (see sections below).

## 5. Proactive Café (afternoon)

Four participants volunteered to act as rapporteurs and owners of each subject to be discussed and were to report back to the plenary the outcomes of the discussions. The subjects to be discussed were: The role of experts and their job description (discussed in two groups); governance – local vs. national – European; how to raise awareness of Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE)?

Workshop participants chose one of the three subjects and formed discussion groups. Four discussion groups were created with approximately 8 persons in each. During the first part of the discussions, participants were asked to reflect upon the issue, de-construct it and find the underlining issues. After having considered the issue from different perspectives, they made a number of suggestions. The participants were given the chance to move once among two different tables (in the middle of the session).

### 5.1. The role of experts and their job description

Two groups discussed this topic and presented a number of suggestions. In analysing the issue, the first group identified a number of questions. The questions were then discussed and addressed by two different groups of experts:

**Question 1:** Is there a hotline for the experts?

- DG JRC- IPTS, Knowledge for Growth Unit, Smart Specialisation Platform (S3P);
- network of experts who has conducted expert work.

**Question 2:** How do we differentiate between JRC contract and private assignment?

- JRC contract is the first one and it is about assessing the regional digital growth strategy while helping the region understand their weaknesses/strengths and potential;
- the private contract (may) comes at the later stage and it is about helping the region to develop and implement the strategy;
- to be clear on the specific role and avoid all possible conflicts of interests assisting the region.

**Question 3:** What language skills are needed?

- If the documents are not available in English, experts need knowledge of the local language. In these cases, it is necessary to contract experts with specific language skills or put pressure on local authorities to provide translation;
- in some EU countries, there are no problems with language because regional representatives can speak English, e.g. Sweden, The Netherlands, etc. and they can provide the experts with summaries in English.

**Question 4:** What is the scope of the expertise? What kind of questions must expert be able to answer?

- Be clear on one's (expert's) background and expertise (excellence, limitations) and provide high-quality answers and suggestions.

**Question 5:** What to do if there are no (relevant) documents are available?

- Consult with S3P on whether and how to continue.

**Question 6:** What is the role of experts in short-term contracts?

- Availability in short-term, availability to travel to regions.
- Ask for relevant documents and check if they target issues according to the evaluation grid received from the EC/S3P.

The same question was discussed by another group that adopted a slightly different approach. Instead of asking and answering the questions, participants discussed the topic from a rather conceptual point of view. Specifically, they defined "The role of experts" as tasks to be carried out by the expert in the regions or at the desk, and "Job description" as the expert's hard and soft skills. In other words, the first one refers to expert activities related to evaluation of strategic documents while the latter is about desired expert qualities and capabilities. Table 1 summarises the discussion in a comprehensive way.

**Table 1: The role of experts and job description**

ROLE OF EXPERTS (task to be carried out)	JOB DESCRIPTION (soft and hard skills needed)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process management</li> <li>• Document analysis</li> <li>• Mentor/catalyst</li> <li>• Understand the region</li> <li>• Ask key questions</li> <li>• Provide fresh insight</li> <li>• Manage expectations</li> <li>• Positive, pro-active</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education and expertise: regional economy, policy management, engineering/ICT, Innovation management.</li> <li>• Skill set for the tasks: a) document analysis at desk, b) implementation assistance, local assessment in the region</li> <li>• Generalist &amp; specialist</li> <li>• Empathic and independent</li> <li>• One-person team</li> <li>• Multilingual and cross-translation</li> <li>• Multicultural</li> <li>• Communicative (intermediary role)</li> <li>• Experience proven capability to be able to process large volumes of documents in a short time-frame</li> <li>• Flexibility and availability</li> </ul>

### 5.2. Governance – local vs. national – European levels

The group identified three main hierarchical levels of governance: i) European where main DAE objectives are delivered, ii) national and iii) regional, where the regional level includes sub-regional levels (municipality, neighbourhoods, cantons, etc.) depending on the governance structure in each country. In consequence, there are different policy-making institutions and processes around Europe responsible for digital growth. Two flows have been identified: one down-stream starting at the EU level and going down to sub-regional level and an up-stream going the opposite way. The first one is about policy making and implementation, while the other is about providing feedback on the policies and feeding the policy decision-making in order to achieve efficiency and high impact.

As the quality and the hierarchy of governance and policies differ from country to country and from region to region and is rather complex, experts should be aware of the specific country institutional set-up, with which authority lie which responsibility, in order to be able to manage their assignment.

### 5.3. How to raise awareness of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE)?

The fourth group discussed the question of how to raise awareness of the Digital Agenda for Europe (DAE). The experts agreed that all stakeholders need to be provided with information on the DAE and get involved in the definition of regional digital strategies. In order to attract the attention of stakeholders it is crucial to inform them about the benefits of the DAE for their business and families in a clear and understandable manner. Likewise, it is important to transfer a message on DAE objectives, and links between DAE and RIS3 in terms of priorities and instruments. A

communication plan including definitions of instruments, target groups, objectives and needs at the regional level should be prepared. Communication needs to be tailored-made so that each stakeholder (group) receives specific relevant information, and thus understand what the benefits of the DAE for himself/herself and the territory are. Thus, it is important to move from generalisation to specification. Another crucial point raised by the experts is that a distinction needs to be made between "needs" and "targets". It was said that "needs" are linked to benefits while targets are linked to indicators and will be monitored and evaluated at a later stage of DAE implementation. The third point relates to the development of digital strategies. It was argued that current initiatives at national and regional levels are of high importance as they reflect stakeholders' needs. In order to identify these initiatives and needs, digital champions at national and regional levels should be found, consulted and consequently involved in the whole programming process. Stakeholder consultation and involvement is thus crucial to the whole process of digital growth.