

Insights on assessing the Smart Specialisation experience so far, far away...



Ramojus Reimeris

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Seville

Generally speaking

The concept of Smart specialization and its implementation reality had tremendous positive effects:

- The best shot so far to unify the concept R&I priorities in the EU (and beyond)

A lot of decision makers and stakeholders from academia and business adopted similar understanding of the concept and similar vocabulary to describe preferences and taken actions.

- Leverage to change the culture of the (R&I) policy making

As it came with strong analytical homework necessity and higher level of justification of decisions, it will have long-lasting effects on the evidence based policy making as well.

- Has initiated analytical approach to R&I policy cycle and a swarm of projects/tools/practices/etc.

Transparency and accountability, interactive monitoring systems, constant sharing of good practices and solutions.

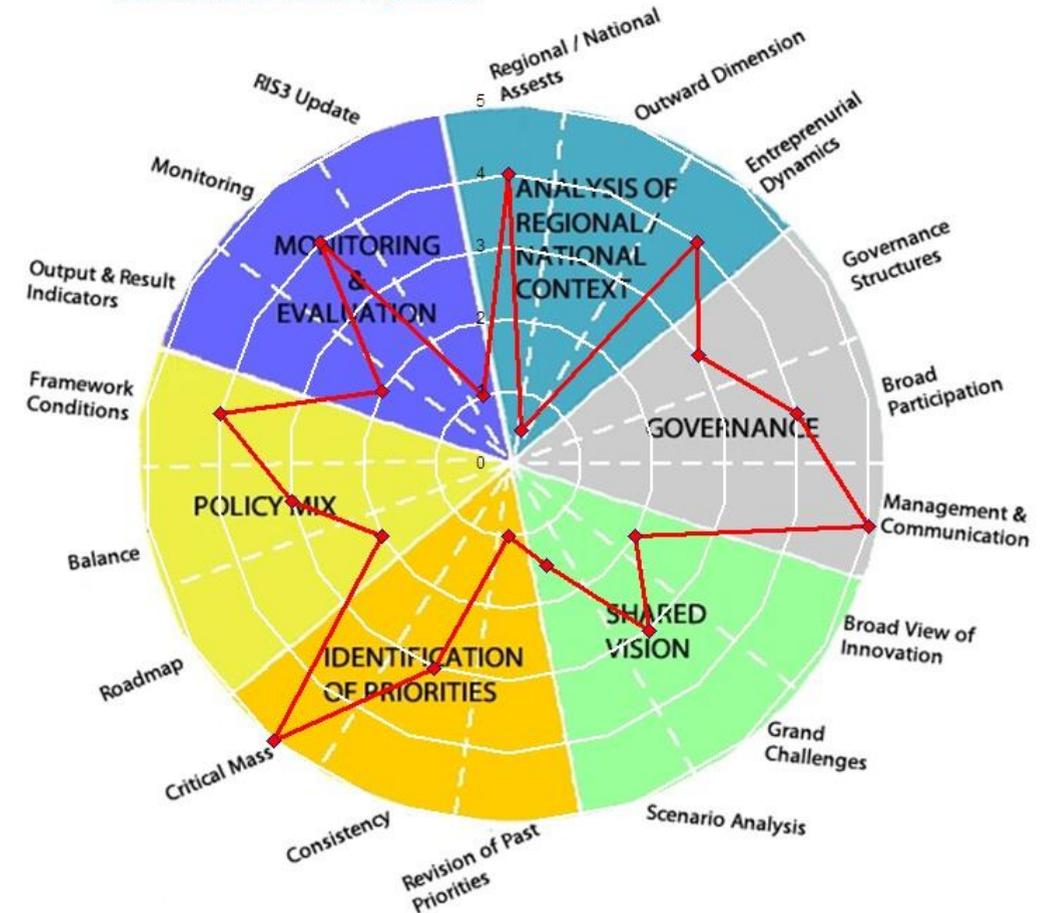


Lessons learned

1. ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL / NATIONAL CONTEXT
2. GOVERNANCE
3. SHARED VISION
4. IDENTIFICATION OF PRIORITIES
5. POLICY MIX
6. MONITORING & EVALUATION

Driving economic change through smart specialisation/RIS3

→ Informal assessment - region XXX



1. Analysis of the context

First step – it should be the easy part:

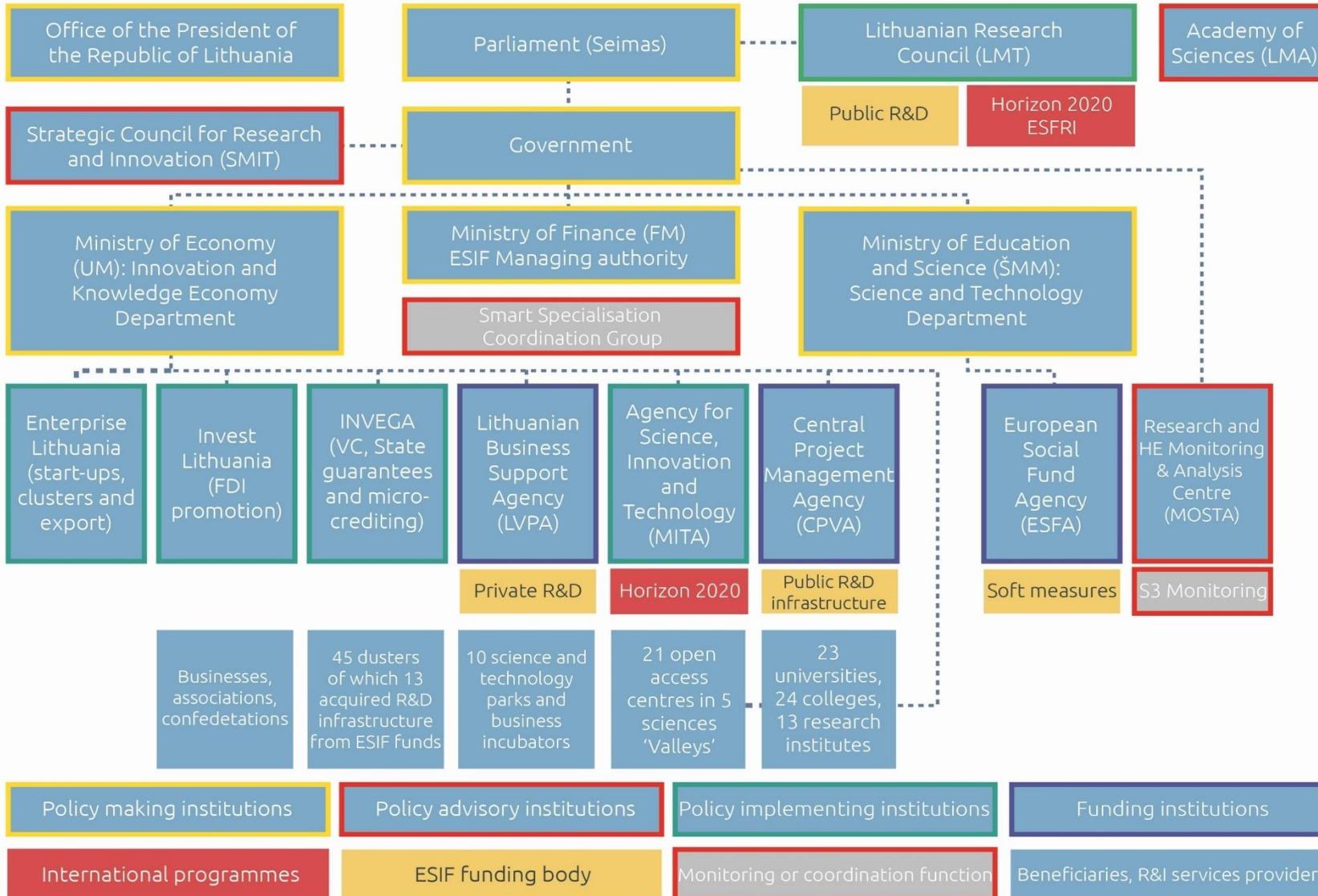
- **How do we identify an asset?** Something big, important, promising?
- **It's not easy to understand the entrepreneurial dynamics.** Almost every sector is specific, with its own culture and traditions.
- **A systemic lack of outward dimension** was recognized by many peer-reviews and regions.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- A (partial) **set of standard obligatory indicators** – research, business, collaboration, etc. Would be extremely helpful to have an informed dialogue with policy makers, lobbyists and stakeholders in general. Also would be beneficial for benchmarking practices.
- **Regional networks, S3 thematic platforms** – a first step for outward dimension. The current actions, especially ones from S3 platform were beneficial building cross-county ties.

2. Governance

R&I ecosystem of Lithuania



2. Governance

Governance gets complicated:

- **Simply too many actors.** Not only the case of Lithuania.
- **Eternal rivals – Ministry for research and Ministry for business.** Should S3 be based more on potential of research or potential of business, if they do not match? More support should be targeted to research or business sector?
- **Change in the political priorities.** The life-span of the S3 is longer than usual policy cycle. Some policy cycles get to be even shorter than 4 years.
- **Administrational fatigue.** S3 requires more resources to manage, because it is essentially more interactive.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- **Time will help,** because after changes it brings stability and traditions.
- **The system will never be perfect,** but it could be better.
- **Clarification of the roles in S3:** decision making, monitoring, accountability for ESIF, etc.
- Simpler ways to apply for **funding, faster evaluation,** encouragement to **policy experimentation.**

3. Shared vision

There might be different perspectives:

- **Grand challenges** are basically the same across EU (and elsewhere).
- But the **vision of the country** and the position in the continent – differs a lot. Every country seeks for stronger economy, mostly high-value added, but with different perspective.
- **Innovation is interpreted/regulated and evaluated differently**. For example, the same team of researchers/entrepreneurs with the same amount of ESIF funding would deliver different results in different countries just because of different regulation.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- More clear, pushing and enabling description of innovation (and research sometimes).

4. Identification of priorities

It is the tricky part, because:

- **Quite broad interpretation of „priority“** – from sector to cross-sector technology. It can be „bioeconomy“ in general or „genome editing for better nutrition“.
- A lightyear **difference in the scope** from very narrow and specific to broad.
- Should priorities be more **justified by the past or by the future**? There are two options that sometimes do not stand together.
- Should reach out for as **many actors as possible or praise the champions**? Maximal inclusion does not favor the few strong ones.
- **Thematic mismatch between research institutions and businesses** makes hard to have priorities of the same „quality“ and justification.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- **Sharing methodologies** and how they worked will be very valuable. Some elements can be easily adapted in other regions and will save costs.
- Little **brighter guiding star** from EC would help – now it's formulated as KET and H2020 sections. An overall strategic guidance for S3 themes could bring more focus. For example, suggestion to prioritize particular parts of biotechnology sector.
- Continue **further engagement from S3Platform**: peer-reviews, homework, regional seminars. They are the main source of information to the regions.

5. Policy mix

So that's where we (Lithuania) failed the most:

- **Old funding approach didn't work well for a new concept.** The concept of intervention, the logic of the measures, the timing and policy mix in general did not follow the new concept.
- Ministries simply couldn't translate expert prepared **roadmaps from a concept to legal documents.**
- Working with ESIF it's **hard to make sufficient adjustments in reasonable timeframe.**
- **Policy mix** within agency -> ministry -> ministries -> region? The level at which intervention is coordinated reflects the administrative capacity of governing body.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- It takes administrative capacity in **more than one ministry to develop a good policy mix.** In seminars and trainings persons from more than one ministry/agency should be invited together.
- **Roadmap approach** (or evolution of it) should get more attention. As roadmaps were the basis of the priority implementation, they should play more important role.

6. Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring is a tool of communication and accountability:

- **Monitoring is complicated**, because priority is an artificial construct with no data. A lot of expert mapping needs to be done and it's resource consuming.
- **Risk of overcomplicating**. A well running and transparent monitoring system will bring it's own benefits but also challenges to the S3 experience.
- **No practice on interim evaluation**. Lithuanian is currently performing an interim evaluation and it will bring more evidence about the method and S3 implementation so far.

What could be improved? (not only Lithuania)

- Take **monitoring as experimentation**. Learning from other regions, learning by doing.
- Monitoring should **integrate, but not duplicate**. High risk of starting to perform very narrow, expensive and specific monitoring functions.
- **A better role of interim evaluation**.
- **Connection with other policy fields** – the integration of S3 approach to other policy fields.

Thoughts for the future

- Two levels (regional and national) makes the concept quite different
- High dependence on ESIF makes the role of Smart specialization completely different
- Roadmaps for the priorities could capitalize more on the existing roadmaps
- Unification and higher control from EU is not the goal, but a temporary measure
- Still the question is: What is a priority?
- The experience so far is still far away



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