

2020 SMARTER CONFERENCE

SMART SPECIALISATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

10 November 2020

10:30-12:30 CET

On Zoom

About the event

Smart Specialisation as a place-based innovation policy has started before the adoption of Agenda 2030. However, the analysis of the priorities chosen at local, regional and national level shows that they contribute to Sustainable Development Goals, as a 'side effect' of bottom up processes and identification of key challenges. The urgency to deliver Agenda 2030, as announced in the Decade of Delivery and Action by UN Secretary General and in the European Green Deal calls for the development of new strategies, instruments and approaches ensuring coherence of policy actions. In this context, bottom up approach is also necessary to mobilise actors and translate the Global Agenda 2030 into place-specific transformative activities. Local communities are more agile, responsive and flexible than national authorities in addressing socio-economic, developmental and environmental challenges.

Smart Specialisation is an approach well suited for authorities at different level of governance to deliver desirable changes: it is a policy concept that promotes sustainable and inclusive growth by supporting economic, societal and environmental activities with high transformative potential. The new generation of Smart Specialisation Strategies should be place-based, territory-relevant, innovation-led transformation agendas for growth and sustainability. The Smart Specialisation Strategies should put even more emphasis on existing assets and local specificities while mobilising stakeholders as main players of socio-economic sustainable growth in complex innovation systems.

Clearly, the key aspects of Smart Specialisation are well aligned with the international discourse on the implementation of the 2030 UN Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. They include innovation, mobilisation, co-creation, localisation, prioritisation, co-investments and cooperation, which are relevant for both agendas. Evidence shows that more and more countries worldwide as well as international institutions show interest in the European experience with the Smart Specialisation. Specifically, Smart Specialisation is increasingly acknowledged as a suitable method for the development of STI for Sustainable Development Goals Roadmaps with a particular emphasis on the territorial and local needs.

Objectives

The objective of the webinar was to **discuss how to design and implement smart specialisation strategies to achieve sustainable transformation and meet the objectives of the 2030 UN Agenda at national, regional and local levels.**

Format

During the session, scientists presented conceptual work and evidence on Smart Specialisation for Sustainable Development Goals. The presentations were followed by a discussion on the issues such

as existing scientific evidence, specific policy actions and instruments in support of Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Smart Specialisation.

Welcome and opening speech

Alessandro Rainoldi, Head of Unit, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Moderator: Albane Demblans, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

The event was opened with two key messages:

First, far from being isolated, this event was placed under the umbrella of the 2020 edition of the Smarter Conference, whose common denominator is precisely to look into the lessons from almost 10 years of Smart Specialisation in the EU, and to envisage the future of this policy approach. In this respect, after considering, in the previous workshops, to what extent Smart Specialisation, as a place-based process, could efficiently and effectively respond to the COVID-19 crisis, we have examined how it can serve as a vehicle for recovery and resilience and now, as a powerful channel towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Second, in connection with this narrative of a global reflection on the future of Smart Specialisation, the exchange will feed into a dual trend, namely that of deepening and widening. As a matter of fact, Smart Specialisation deepening means, in particular, instilling and integrating the sustainability dimension, so that the so-called S3 becomes S4, that is to say Smart Specialisation Strategies for Sustainability. In parallel, a widening track has been under way, whereby Smart Specialisation has extended from the European to the international scale and could make a decisive contribution to the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations.

SESSION 1: CONCEPT, METHODS AND APPROACHES

Michal Miedzinski, Institute for Sustainable Resources, University College London, UK

Presentation: Smart Specialisation for Sustainable Development Goals: a journey from practice to theory and back again. Revisiting theoretical and conceptual foundations of S3 to align them with the SDGs

Summary: The European Green Deal (EGD) puts sustainable development at the heart of the EU agenda. There is an expectation that Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3) foster the transition towards sustainability in Europe and make a significant contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The presentation offers initial reflections on whether and how embracing the SDGs may align with or be at odds with the current theoretical foundations and conceptual framework of S3. The contribution is based on evidence collected from the selected European regions and the review of theoretical and empirical studies on regional innovation strategies and sustainable development.

Anna Wieczorek, Technology, Innovation and Society Department, Eindhoven University of Technology, The Netherlands

Presentation: Sustainability Transitions: challenges in making them happen

Summary: Urgent societal challenges require new ways of framing the problems and new ways of dealing with them. The old end-of-pipe, technological fixes and even product and process innovations, despite their contributions to addressing of the problems in the past, do not suffice anymore. Sustainability Transitions is a relatively young field that proposes a proactive approach based on radical and participatory change of the socio-technical systems providing human needs such as energy or mobility. This talk outlines the basics of systemic change and necessary policy to facilitate fair transformation of unsustainable systems. It gives two examples from practice and discusses governance challenges that emerge from engaging with transitions in the real contexts.

Lars Coenen, The Mohn Centre for Innovation and Regional Development, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Presentation: Smart specialisation, policy experimentation and place-based sustainability transitions: insights from Gippsland, Australia

Summary: The Gippsland Smart Specialisation Strategy (GS3) has been set up to renew the regional economy of an iconic Australian coal region experiencing the transformative local impact of an unfolding global low-carbon transition in its full force. Based on principles and repertoires 'translated' from the EU, GS3 offers a policy experiment for Australian regional development practice to adopt a balanced and inclusive approach to sustainable territorial development. In reflecting on the experimental nature of this initiative, this talk will discuss the wider opportunities, challenges and dilemmas for smart specialisation to 'shift gear' towards a transformative innovation policy paradigm directed towards sustainability goals and imperatives. Our findings and experiences highlight the importance of place-based contextualization. By exploring the scope of local low-carbon innovation and experimentation in a country that is deeply divided around climate change, the institutional conditions for sustainable smart specialisation strategies are emphasized.

SESSION 2: PRACTICE AND EVIDENCE

Katerina Ciampi Stancova, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Presentation: Science Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development Goals: Smart Specialisation and transnational partnerships

Summary: The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (Addis Ababa Action Agenda), adopted in July 2015, put forward the idea that Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) together with capacity-building are among the key means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A number of approaches and methodologies for STI roadmap have been developed, tested and deployed in countries around the world. The methodologies have not been necessarily developed within the framework of SDGs, because they had been conceptualised and operationalised before the adoption of the Agenda 2030. Yet, there is ongoing expert work aiming at updating and modifying the STI roadmap methodologies to make them relevant and practical for the government representatives to achieve SDGs objectives. During the presentation the speaker discussed different approaches and practices from systemic perspectives. In addition, she reflected upon the role and importance of transnational partnerships in STI in the achievement of SDGs.

Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Technical University of Vienna & IIASA, Austria

Presentation: Innovation for a safe and just future on a stable and resilient planet

Summary: COVID-19 pandemic is an immediate danger that also offers opportunities for embarking on a sustainable development pathway. Science, technology, and innovation offers opportunities for achieving a just and safe future for all, for the people and the planet and more immediately response strategies for mitigating the pandemic. The world is at the beginning of a digital revolution that is accelerated by the pandemic and in the longer term can also catalyze the sustainability transformation should it be possible to assure the appropriate social steering.

Only 10 years are left to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Since their universal adoption in 2015, important progress has been made but if fall short of the ambition and aspiration they offered for the humanity. The world is also very far from what has to be done to achieve the Paris Climate Agreement, namely halving global emissions every decade toward net zero by the midcentury.

Trillions have been pledged around the world for the COVID-19 pandemic recovery and economic stimulus to build better. The achievement of the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement will require transformational change that could be characterized by building new to replace the old that led to the unbearable pressures on the people and the planet.

European Green Deal and Smart Specialisation offer a unique opportunity to strengthen the contribution of science, technology, and innovation toward achieving a sustainable future for all. Smart Specialisation is an innovation policy concept to enhance and support regional innovation, development and prosperity by helping and enabling regions to focus on their strengths. It is based on partnerships with stakeholders, between businesses, public entities, and knowledge institutions. It can be characterized as a promotion and support of the “bottom-up” innovation strategies.

The 2030 Agenda foresees science, technology and innovation as the central to achieving its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their targets from “top down”, from the global level to country and community. Integration of Smart Specialisation and 2030 Agenda would bring multiple benefits and synergies. It is essential to avoid trade-off among complex multitude of goals and targets across scales and time.

The Green Deal has the potential of providing exactly such integration and could provide a model for the next phase of human development priorities to achieve safe and just future for all on a stable and resilient planet. The way forward in addressing these challenges in a systemic, integrative, and holistic framework is the focus of the last TWI2050 Report on Innovations for Sustainability: Pathways to an efficient and efficient post-pandemic future. (www.TWI2050.org).

Monika Matusiak, Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Presentation: SDG-oriented by design – results from the Global Pilot Programme on Science, Technology and Innovation Roadmaps for Sustainable Development Goals

Summary: The analysis of the Smart Specialisation priority domains adopted in the period 2014-2020 shows that they already contribute to Sustainable Development Goals. So far, this happened as a result of a bottom-up process aimed at the identification of the key areas for public and private investment in research and innovation in different regions and countries, mostly in the EU. The new approach tested by Joint Research Centre in the UN Global Pilot Programme on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Roadmaps for Sustainable Development Goals has piloted the mapping of SDG

challenges and the STI potential that can be mobilized to address them as a part of the diagnostic part of the smart specialization process. Further steps include designing the approaches to plan and measure the contribution to SDS also in implementation and monitoring phases. The presentation will show the first results of the pilot analyses and discuss planned next steps.