

Discussion on general topics of RIS3 in Seinäjoki

Leadership, sources of power and policy traps for smart specialisation implementation

The topic of the discussion on general topics of RIS3 was introduced by a keynote speech of Prof. Markku Sotarauta (Tampere University), entitled “Regional (Place) Leadership and Implementation”. He started that there would be much more networking nowadays compared to the eighties. Leadership would be represented by how you influence the people, their networks, etc. on each level.

Markku presented five common traps that are associated to smart specialisation implementation (where actors are misled into acting contrary to their intentions/interests OR unpleasant situations):

- Institutional conflict trap (e.g. a lack of supportive institutions; clear answers for what is possible and what not)
- Governance trap (e.g. autonomy and power to make choices and decisions; centralised system may weaken capacity to act at subnational level)
- Capability trap (e.g. competent staff; reliance on consultants; no sufficient training e.g. on management, networking, convincing people)
- Mobilisation trap (e.g. are entrepreneurs willing to contribute to collective and public driven discovery processes; danger of rent seeking; stake-holders won't leave own incentives, logics, drivers, ambitions, visions & paymasters behind)
- Shared vision trap (e.g. vision is not only about communicating desired futures but also something to fight and argue about, to support or attack)

A place sensitive leader is assumed to be more capable than 'followers' in understanding:

- overall requirements of smart specialisation and a region
- key actor's interests, motives and resources as well as anticipating their responses to various initiatives
- estimating their power bases and capacity to influence

Further conclusion(s) can be drawn:

- Smart specialisation will fail if the traps will not be dealt with
- Smart specialisation has a better chance with a well-established and shared place-based leadership
- Place leadership is a unique form of leadership – calls for training and willingness to learn
- Power and capabilities need to be seen in a new light
- Regional leadership needs to be considered in time and space. Different actors are important to different roles and phases → you need to be sensitive of this and support actors of regional development and smart specialisation

Following this, the partners discussed in five groups the questions “How are the different sources of power utilized in your region when implementing the RIS3 strategy?” and “Can you identify any of these policy traps in your region?”, before the summarising questions 1. “How do you see the role of different sources of power when shaping and implementing RIS3 strategies?” and 2. “Which policy traps do you consider to be the most difficult in respect of RIS3 strategy shaping and implementation?”.

The answers included:

- In Denmark – the power for smart specialisation strategies will be centralised, thus there is less local power and institutional traps occur between national and regional levels
- In Finland – Satakunta, South Ostrobothnia and South Savo, regions have resource power, but less interpretive power which they should have to lead the process; they interpret needs of stakeholders and consult them; a shared vision can not be taken for granted
- In Sweden – power exists in every field, there are decentralising processes from national to regional power, supported by (financial) resources from national level, based on regional development authorities and expert teams; mobilisation traps have been overcome by platforms

Often named traps are:

- Institutional conflict traps; e.g. picking the winners; or that intermediaries have to chase funding; or because there exist no relations between authorities and smart specialisation strategies
- Shared vision trap
- Political leadership is the most critical ingredient
- Mobilisation trap, e.g. when implementers don't feel involved
- Mobilisation trap, e.g. there exist EU-guidelines (S3 handbook), but power, resources and willingness to change something are lacking → it is necessary and important to convince people that RIS3 is a good idea
- Capability trap, e.g. if influential businessmen want to take action

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