



Getting Regional Smart Specialisation Strategies closer to business

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR “STRATEGY OWNERS”

*Based on the Interreg Baltic Sea Region Project EmplInno –
“S3-Empowering for Innovation and Growth in Medium-Sized
Cities and Regions”*

Emplnno

S3-Empowering for Innovation and Growth in Medium-Sized Cities and Regions

Since 2016 the Interreg BSR project Emplnno supported partner organisations from twelve regions in Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden to foster the implementation and improvement of RIS3.

The project provided strategy owners, strategy implementers and other innovation actors with resources to better work with the RIS3 approach and boosted cooperation and knowledge exchange between stakeholders within and beyond the partner regions.

The partners developed and implemented numerous R&D transfer workshops, matchmaking and networking events as well as training formats.

By doing so they provided companies, universities and other actors with knowledge and resources to implement innovative and competitive ideas.

Furthermore, Emplnno helped to improve and update regional smart specialisation strategies by transferring experiences and recommendations to regional authorities as well as strategy implementers to adapt and use the RIS3 for the benefit and growth of the region.

The implementation of Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) is by no means trivial.

Regional authorities (as “strategy owners”) face common problems and obstacles in the process of managing, delivering and monitoring the strategy.

Innovation intermediaries (as “strategy implementers”) - such as business support organisations, science parks and universities - often lack the institutional capacity, resources and experiences to work with the strategies.

The partners of the Interreg Baltic Sea Region project “EmplInno” cooperated to foster the implementation and improvement of RIS3 in medium-sized cities and regions in the Baltic Sea Region.

*Further information: **www.empinno.eu***

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Understand the RIS3 approach as game changer instead of technocratic duty!

Broaden the knowledge about the RIS3 and its chances to encourage political support

- **Lead** a dialogue with innovation actors, politicians and citizens not about smart specialisation or funding, but about what creates value in your region. Take this as starting point to develop your line of reasoning

Make clear that regions have their innovation ecosystems and funding chances in own hands

- **Smart specialisation** as tool for innovation and partnership building can spur growth in a clever way. Know your assets and valorise them!

Exercise place-based leadership to implement future-oriented direction-setting

- **Understand** the key actors' interests, motives and resources and estimate their power bases and capacity to influence
- **Avoid** common traps when implementing smart specialisation (like institutional conflict or capability traps)

Keep the RIS3 alive and use it as guidance, not as set-in-stone!

Keep focus on a long-term strategic aim of the region

- **Keep** track despite deviations that will occur – the value will not monetarise tomorrow

Be open to new specialisations in your region or new instruments

- **The world is changing**, and so is the (regional) economy. Consider new stimuli and signals from market changes to find the right niches
- **RIS3** is a continuous evolving working process, but nothing gets ever done if objectives and the focus of regional strategies are changing all the time. Find the right balance!

Involve your stakeholders throughout the implementation for feedback!

● **Re-activate** your Entrepreneurial Process of Discovery. Innovation intermediaries, companies, steering committees etc. have an important word to say – be open to their opinion and channel their feedback

● **Collect** the actual needs and reality of the companies to design and improve policy instruments and the strategy-setup

Take the RIS3 monitoring and evaluation results as opportunity!

Organise adequate monitoring and evaluation systems

● **Apply** the right mix of quantitative instruments with qualitative instruments. The latter might be more resource-intensive, but it's necessary to understand what is happening "on the ground" at micro-level

● **Don't just collect** many indicators – try to get the true picture of your interventions

● **Keep** in mind the challenges like the causal relations or the time lag of an intervention to the measurement

Act and adjust unsuccessful instruments or priorities

● **Smart** specialisation is about priority setting in a smart way – if e.g. certain specialisations don't perform or absorb funds, adjust your focus and instruments. This is not without conflict potential, but it's needed

● **Don't follow** the paths that have always been taken, even if this creates turbulences

You can find transnational experiences, discussion results and good practices of regional innovation policy instruments under
www.empinno.eu/network

Bridge the gap between strategy and companies!

Optimise the implementation system with well-equipped intermediaries

Working “on the ground” with SMEs is resource-intensive – intermediaries need sufficient competencies and capacities to translate the RIS3 into concrete company-targeted approaches

Coordinate who in the innovation ecosystem is doing what in order to prevent organisations from doing the same things in parallel instead of cooperating

Strengthen the cooperation among strategy implementers

Create a solid long-term institutional foundation for the RIS3 implementation. Frequent restructuring of intermediaries risks that organisations with knowledge are lost and trust among stakeholders decreases

Ensure and set up inclusive dialogue channels with stakeholders

Personal links between strategy owners and intermediaries are equally important as more formalised communication to avoid too much person-bound knowledge

Steer the S3 implementation and regional policy instruments in good cooperative ways with relevant actors

Engage core people. Especially in “institutionally thin regions” development work often is based on key people acting in an accountable manner

Develop a useful setting in your multi-level governance system with the municipal and national level

Be open to learn from other regions!

Discuss with and learn from other actors about common issues

All regions consider how to best mobilising stakeholders, how to develop the future of RIS3, overcome governance traps, etc. – make use of this search for good solutions and join an open discussion!

Adapt good ideas how things are done elsewhere to your specific context