

THEME 1: Inclusive engagement of stakeholders in regional smart specialization process [quadruple helix]

Challenge 1A: How do we make the development of our regions inclusive? How do we engage diverse stakeholders in Baltic Sea Region?

Sub-questions:

- How to connect and work closely together with politicians, strategists, regions and cities in the context of developing Smart Cities?
- How to involve citizens and stakeholders in the city's strategic planning processes? How can they feel that their input counts?

Background/ Context

Involvement of all relevant innovation stakeholders is crucial for regional RIS3 strategy process. The principles of smart specialization require uniting national and regional stakeholders and pooling scattered resources around an excellence-driven shared vision of the future. The framework of smart specialization is meant to allow the different stakeholders to pursue their own activities and goals, revisiting and prioritizing them according to the shared vision. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to organize a collective strategy development process – to ensure stakeholder commitment, to pool the dispersed knowledge and capabilities together, and build shared understanding and vision of the future.

The quadruple helix approach emphasizes the interplay of four major stakeholder groups (public sector, industry, academia and civil society, including media) for organizing the regional strategy development and knowledge sharing. Most often, public actors are expected to launch the process, mobilise and engage key stakeholders, as well as leverage resources to support the necessary transformational processes. Entrepreneurs are usually perceived as the force to identify opportunities and ways to achieve them. The roles of other stakeholders are more open, adaptable and fluctuating.

It has been acknowledged that engaging civil society is crucial for increasing public understanding and acceptance of regional development processes. However, it is not always clear exactly what role can civil society take in regional development and planning processes, how to best organize and leverage the capabilities of civil society in a structured, systematic and meaningful way. Processing the inputs of citizens and civil society organizations requires well-planned means of engagement, so that it is possible to demonstrate how these inputs have been taken into account. This is essential for maintaining the commitment and motivation of any stakeholder that takes part in the process.

Objectives

Engagement as a process can be described as relatively sustained and systematic interaction between parties, including sharing of information, the exchange of opinions and reasons, and the articulation of values. Ideally, engagement is an ongoing process or conversation that builds trust and relationships. In practice, it is challenging to find the one-fits-all solution for engaging diverse groups of stakeholders. The objectives of Challenge 1 in the context of smart specialization strategy development include:

- Identifying the tailored needs and approaches to different groups of stakeholders, e.g. citizens, politicians (and others)
- Identifying working methods that can unite the diverse groups of stakeholders around the same process of regional development or planning
- Identifying the ways of maintaining motivation and commitment, demonstrating trust and confidence for the role of different stakeholder groups
- Defining what is a City-driven region (for each region separately) and mapping relevant stakeholders