

## **THEME 4: Grand societal challenges as a basis of BSR RIS3: linking and attracting businesses**

### ***Challenge 4: How to tackle grand societal challenges like climate change, circular economy and healthy ageing via smart specialization in Baltic Sea Region? How to attract relevant businesses inclusively?***

#### **Background / Context**

Grand societal challenges involve the pressing real-life problems related to environment, health, and quality of life. Due to their complexity, they require boundary spanning collaborations across different scientific disciplines, sectors and countries involving heterogeneous partners from research, engineering, business, policy-making and civil society. For example, climate change is not only an environmental problem: its effects will alter people's lives in economic, social and environmental spheres. It is evident that climate change can't be solved through environmental policy actions alone, but needs a systemic approach and involvement of diverse stakeholders on global and local levels.

Circular economy has been identified as one of the important pathways to both reducing the effects of climate change yet maintaining economic activities and increasing economic, social and environmental capitals. The major approach offered by circular economy is being restorative and regenerative, rethinking waste and finding synergies between economic actors and regions. This requires system-wide innovation, since such approach can't be embraced by actors in isolation.

Healthy ageing is about "optimizing opportunities for good health, so that older people can take an active part in society and enjoy an independent and high quality of life" (Swedish Institute for Public Health). This approach emphasizes how older people can contribute in valuable ways to the functioning of the society, building on their skills and experience. Yet this requires system-wide support to introduce necessary health promotion interventions on societal level, and construct opportunities for more active involvement of older people to solving societal challenges & tasks.

As can be seen, societal challenges are systemic and non-linear, requiring out-of-the-box thinking, embracement of ambiguity, and receptivity to new ideas in multi-actor settings. Smart specialisation approach recommends that regions focus its efforts and resources on a limited number of ambitious yet realistic priorities (niches), where they would be able to develop excellence and develop in a smart, sustainable and inclusive manner. Uniting the many national and regional stakeholders around a shared vision for development requires an inclusive approach to innovation.

Coordinating and facilitating innovation efforts in regional contexts is usually the prerogative of the public sector. So, it is worthwhile exploring how public sector can stimulate discussion and increased stakeholder interaction around grand societal challenges like climate change, circular economy and healthy ageing. It is also important to demonstrate the relevance of smart specialisation strategies to the different stakeholder groups, and build a shared vision of these regional strategies.

#### **Objectives**

- Identifying and tackling the key issues like carbon neutrality and circular economy (e.g. plastic waste) in Baltic Sea Region
- Building the vision, strategy and concrete actions for Baltic Sea Region on grand societal challenges like climate change, circular economy and healthy ageing
- Stimulate engagement and collaboration with businesses, start-ups and other stakeholders - citizens, academic institutions, municipalities in the pioneering actions related to grand challenges in Baltic Sea Region