Smart-Up BSR Pilot Planning: a short methodology guide

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PURPOSE: this methodology guide aims to provide accessible, concise and clear guidelines on how to select, prepare, facilitate and document pilot planning, as well as provide brief guidelines on preparing action plans for pilot implementation. It provides a description of the main steps for pilot planning, possible challenges, the process for resolving them, and lessons learned.

TARGET GROUP: participating Baltic Sea regions, stakeholders and responsible organisations for the smart-specialisation strategy development and implementation.

VISION

Most essential in the pilot planning process is agreeing on the bigger vision and clear outputs for the partner pilots. As Smart-Up BSR vision is to promote cross-regional collaboration for smart specialisation, sharing of best practices in RIS3 planning and implementation, regional capacity building and establishment of new networks, the planning of pilots is based on two clear principles:

1. Extending existing networks and connecting existing regional initiatives to cross-regional and EU level projects for building up synergies and increasing impact.

2. Launching of new pilots based on the outputs of innovation camps.

Finding a common vision is a collaborative process that builds on open discussion inside the project. In practice, the vision crystallizes over time during discussions in partners' meetings and in the reiterative process of discussing partner goals, regional goals and how to connect to EU-level goals.

MULTI-LEVEL APPROACH

In the planning of pilots there are two levels: ***partner (regional) level*** and ***Baltic Sea Region level***. Some pilots will be launched on partner (regional) level responding to regional challenges and can serve as local examples for other regions to learn from. Another option is to plan cross-regional pilots, involving several regions from Baltic Sea Area. This type of pilots have a great potential of continuing beyond the timeframe of the project (e.g. building new collaborations and networks, or extending existing ones). Pilots need to emphasize the impact they aim to achieve on regional and BSR levels.

MAIN STEPS

1. Mapping relevant regional stakeholders: partners are asked to compile a list of stakeholders that could be relevant in the process of RIS3 planning and implementation. Outside-of-the-box thinking is useful for reaching out to unusual but societally oriented stakeholders to achieve more innovative results. For example, exploring local research excellence areas and activities of the NGOs is useful for defining societally important topics of development.

Regional stakeholders have the potential to become "challenge owners" in the innovation camps, depending on what topics they are addressing in their everyday work. They have deep knowledge about the context and the complexity of the challenges. They are also often willing to launch new initiatives (pilots), which would be in line with their main goals, functions and development plans. In some cases they have funding available for pilots, or have experience in applying for funding.

2. Scanning for existing initiatives and projects for achieving synergies and larger impact: based on Smart-UP BSR spearheads (climate change, circular economy, smart city, healthy ageing) partners are asked to scan for existing initiatives and projects in the region. Connecting to ongoing initiatives allows to identify the steps for achieving even bigger impact in the region, for example by expanding the networks.

3. Selecting regional priority for pilot implementation within the project: after analysing existing initiatives and defining potential for collaboration or new initiatives, project partners define 1-2 regional priorities for launching pilots.

4. Face-to-face discussion: sharing the identified priorities and ongoing projects, as well as stakeholder networks during a partner meeting is essential for exploring what do different regions have in common, and what kind of potential exists in launching cross-regional initiatives.

Project leader opens the discussion and reflection of the regions on the different levels of impact they would to achieve with the pilots: Baltic Sea Region level, regional (local) level, and partner level.

5. Bilateral discussions for cross-regional cooperation: the project leader initiates bilateral discussions with partners to explore which initiatives they would be willing to lead, how it links to their existing initiatives and select together one or several projects where they would like other regions/partners to join in. The discussions focus on the outputs partners hope to achieve and how.

6. Launching regional process for pilot planning: launching regional processes requires partners to organize workshops with regional stakeholders to discuss the roles and responsibilities in upcoming pilots. One of the stimulating ways to engage with stakeholders is to organize workshops making regional SWOT analysis. Based on several scenarios of the future, stakeholders come together to discuss what are regional strength and competence areas would be relevant in the future no matter how the future develops. Partners of Smart-UP BSR project organize regional stakeholder workshops on SWOT analysis during autumn 2018.

7. Action plan: drafting action plans is a reiterative process. First action plans are made after bilateral discussions with the project leader, these drafts can be modified in the process of involving additional partners and stakeholders to the planning of the pilot. The plans should include a clear set of steps for launching the pilots, timeframe, feasibility of the pilot and possible funding sources. Especially when launching the pilots based on the outputs of innovation camps, it is necessary to explain how innovation camp ideas will be shaped into more feasible pilot initiatives.