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Smart Up BSR Pilot Planning:
a Short Methodology Guide

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1. 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.

2. TARGET GROUP

Participating Baltic Sea regions, stakeholders and responsible organisations for the smart-specialisation strategy development and implementation. The guide may be useful to other European regions and organizations working with smart specialisation.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. MAIN STEPS

Step 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.

Step 2: Scanning for existing initiatives and projects to achieve synergies and 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.

Step 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.

Step 4: Face-to-face discussions

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.

Step 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.

Step 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.

Step 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.

6.   REGIONAL LESSONS LEARNED IN PILOT PLANNING

The lessons below have been collected from Smart Up project partner organizations, ranging from regional development organizations, municipalities to academic institutions. They represent learning experiences in different countries around the Baltic Sea, which have been structured according to recurring themes. Due to data sensitivity, lessons are anonymous.

STAKEHOLDERS

Get stakeholders involved early on

It is important to involve all relevant identified stakeholders, and invite them to the planning early on. Participative approaches allow more open discussions, and stimulate creativity. Inclusive attitudes towards stakeholders are key for building regional consensus related to innovation and development, and for lobbying regional interests on national level.

Be attentive to stakeholder needs & interests

Especially in the initial stages of pilot planning it is good to be flexible, and make room for accommodating stakeholder interests and needs. Being too rigid with the scope and content of the pilot, forcing your own agenda to partners and stakeholders is a great de-motivator. It is essential that the pilot generates value for all involved organizations, this will build the commitment   and   ownership   of   the   pilot   among   the   involved.

Together we can do more

Often this is not obvious to the involved actors, and it is important to communicate and convince bigger and smaller actors that they are of value to each other, and that together more will be achieved. More experienced organizations can share their knowledge with the less experienced ones, and it is usually a great advantage and fulfilling experience to both. Rather than competition, collaborative spirits help to overcome local political divisions.

COMMUNICATION

Make sure the environment is friendly

Motivating and inspiring creativity is about keeping communication culture open and friendly. Everybody needs to feel safe to put forward their ideas, and feel appreciated. It is worthwhile to create practices that allow more open communication in the pilot.

Finding common language

Actors from different organizations may have their own organizational culture and ways of articulating their goals, needs and plans. It is strategically important to combine these different ways of communicating under topics that meet the financial and content requirements of all involved actors. Building a "common language" can be challenging, but will pay off in the end.

Practice the art of communicating "softer" issues

Some of the pilot results are more obvious, while other are less visible and tangible – such as extended networks and new communities. Nevertheless, both tangible and intangible results should be appreciated. Learning to articulate the value of "softer" activities is necessary for showing how pilots can have far-reaching impacts into the future, which might not be immediately obvious. This is especially relevant for communicating the results to the outsiders.

Communicate with purpose

From the very outset of the pilot it is important to define expected outcomes, who will benefit from these results and how to best communicate to these groups. This has direct influence on the strategic phrasing and methods of communication. On the other hand, never underestimate the potential of the pilot to be useful for other actors, settings and national environments. Be open and alert to opportunities of sharing the results to different audiences.

COMMITMENT & MOTIVATION

High level support to make the pilot a reality

Planning pilot projects requires mapping relevant strategies, policies and priorities, identifying the ones that are most central for the pilot in development. Connecting to international, national level or regional policies and priorities helps to achieve greater commitment and receive support from high level decision makers and funding bodies to make the pilot a reality.

Entrepreneurial attitudes attract inter-regional partners

Even if it is not easy to find inter-regional partners in the planning stages of the pilot, trial-and-error approach, entrepreneurial spirit, small scale local piloting and visible results usually start to attract many different actors who would like to join in. As a result, more possibilities open up for involving inter-regional stakeholders.

Future focus for building motivation

Often there is a lot of uncertainty in the initial stages of pilot planning. Especially if the funding decisions are unclear, investing additional efforts, time and resources into the planning of a new pilot is hardly attractive to employees doing their regular work. It is helpful to take future orientation: articulate the benefits of participating to the pilot planning, how it will be useful in the future, what new learnings can be achieved in the planning process and demonstrate the commitment of the others in the organization.

Partner "homework" for more productive meetings

Each meeting with partners or stakeholders should focus on specific issues, industries or questions. However, informational meetings and one way information flow are often

demotivating. Building commitment is easier when responsibilities are clearly assigned, and every involved organization is given some "homework" to bring to the meetings. Sharing "homework" results stimulates discussion between participants, activates hidden expertise and facilitates more trustful relationships.

STRATEGIC THINKING

Design pilots for large scale positive impact

Since pilot projects are meant to be small and flexible, the planning may seem rather uncomplicated. The most important competence is to learn defining the target group and challenge area in such a way that it would work on a small scale, yet generate enough data and insights to support the decision making process for positive impacts on larger scale.

Overcoming silos for more innovative thinking

Pilots are often touching upon several topics that may even belong to different departments in the organization. Sometimes it means that similar or even conflicting pilots are being designed and run by different departments. Overcoming the silos requires more holistic vision about the future, and searching for synergies with what is happening inside and outside the organization. When planning a pilot, it is good to connect its impact to the vision of the organization, articulate how impact will be monitored and how the pilot can be part of the continuum of different organizational activities.

Learning from successes and failures

Although it is important to learn from success stories, sharing failures and how to overcome them can be even more stimulating. Yet it is truly difficult to establish accepted ways of sharing failures, because such experiences are sensitive. Trustful relationships between involved actors and possibility for informal discussions mediate the sharing of less "shiny" stories.

Focus on the challenge, not the technology

In technology-driven pilot projects it is easy to focus on technology, while overlooking the challenge it is supposed to solve. In this case the danger lies in missing the connection to organizational, processual and behavioural changes needed for successful pilot implementation. In the planning stage it is important to design the steps or questions for bringing the focus back to the challenge, and connecting to the different aspects.

Minimum viable products for minimizing risks

Prototyping, creating minimum viable products (MVP), and having open development activities, where the right stakeholders are involved is crucial for keeping the financial risks at a minimum in pilots projects and for ensuring that the outcome of the pilot creates value and impact.