Report on the usage of a live polling app at the European Week of Regions and Cities

Engage Your Audience with Live Polling App: Experiences of an Interactive Session at the European Week of Regions and Cities

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The Regional Studies Association at the European Week of Regions and Cities

In October 2018, we were invited to host a four-hour session at the European Commission's European Week of Regions and Cities (EWRC) in Brussels. The EWRC is an annual event celebrating European regions and cities, bringing together national, regional and local policy-makers, business leaders, trade unionists and academic experts from across Europe to deliberate and explore ways in which European regions can create new jobs and deliver sustainable and inclusive growth. For us, EWRC represented an excellent opportunity to present

and discuss our Regional Studies Association Policy Expo Grant Scheme (1/7/17-28/2/19) entitled 'Revitalising Regional Economies through Smart Specialisation and Industry 4.0' with leading regional experts from business, policy and academia.

The special session at EWRC hosted a line-up of speakers/panellists of internationally renowned academics and policy makers – *Dr Román Arjona, (DG Research & Innovation, European Commission), Dr Mafini Dosso and Dr Antonio Vezzani (both Joint Research Centre in Seville, Prof Lisa De Propris (University of Birmingham), Dr Anastasiia Konstantynova (Steinbeis-Europa-Zentrum), Dr Sandrine Labory (University of Ferrara) and Dr Peter Wostner (Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy, Slovenia)*.

In addition to delivering a session of high quality insights and analytical debate, we were also acutely aware the EU Commission had expressed a desire for EWRC sessions to have greater audience participation. Organisers and sponsors of sessions were therefore encouraged to use a variety of mechanisms, such as Audience Response and surveys to better engage the audience and to facilitate a discussion around issues that were of importance to them.

Pre-Session Survey

Our preparations for delivering an interactive session started several months before. We were keen to survey registered participants and utilise their responses in the speaker presentations. In early July, we created a short pre-session survey on Smart Specialisation and Industry 4.0 (I4.0) for registered participants. The survey included questions on how respondents viewed both Smart Specialisation and I4.0, and on the extent of innovation led activities in their own region.

During September 2018, there was a short window of three weeks to administer an online Qualtrics based survey to all registered participants via the EWRC. In total, we obtained a response rate of 33%, and we then had around 7 days to analyse the data before circulating this analysis to speakers, in order for them to incorporate it into their presentations.

This pre-session survey data was especially useful in enabling speakers to tailor their topics and presentations at an appropriate level for the audience. It also enabled speakers to identify the key issues and specific challenges to focus upon, and which were particularly relevant to the audience. Some examples of the data

analysis are included in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

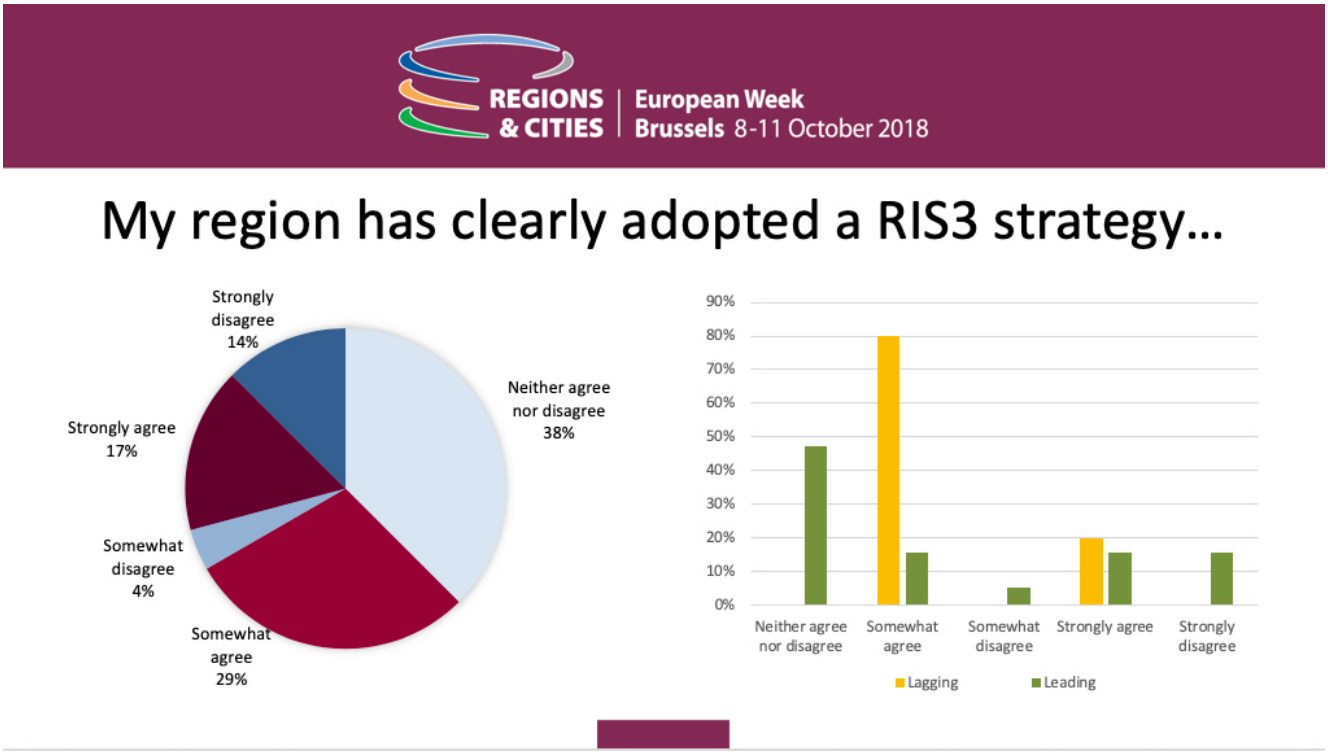

Figure 1. Question on Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3) in the region where the participant works.

Note: We classified lagging regions according to the European Commission document 2014/99/EU

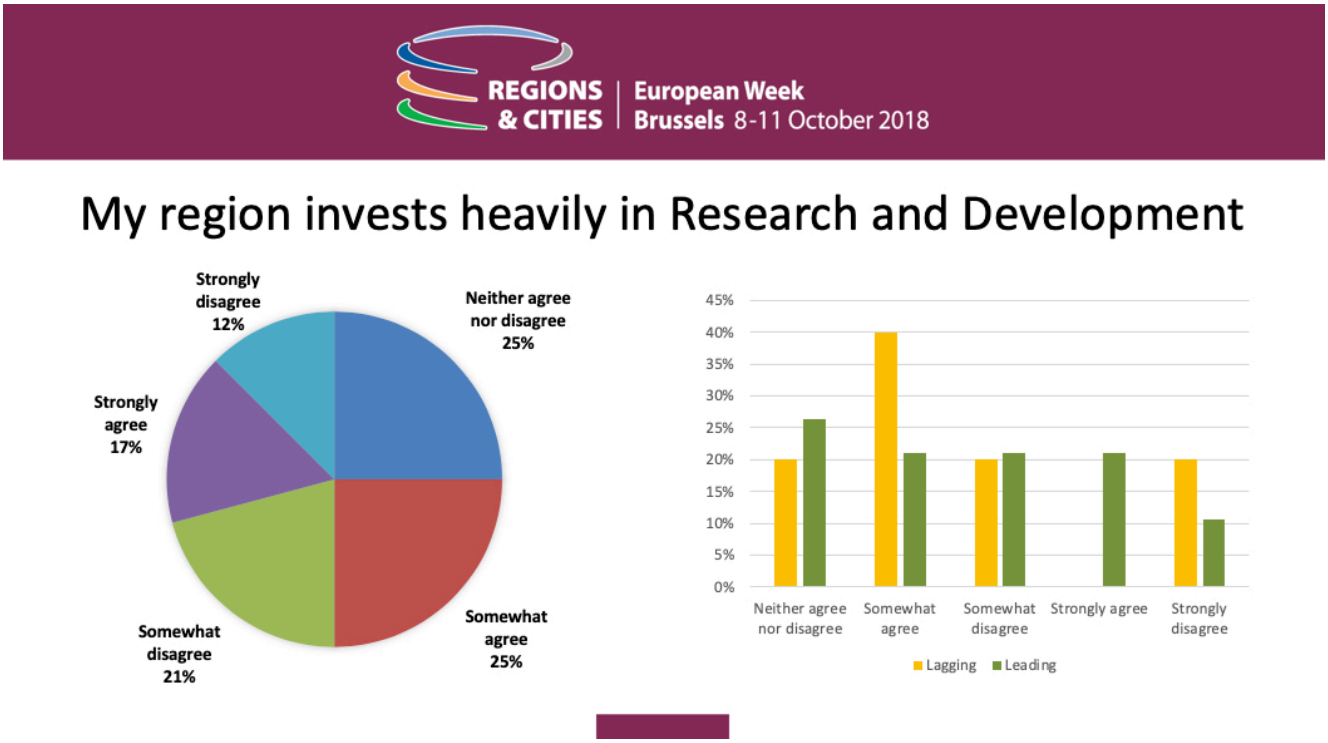

Figure 2. Question on investments in Research and Development made in the region where the participant works.

Audience Response – *Sli.do*

In order to generate live interaction during the session, we also utilised the EU's Audience Response system. This had the advantage of providing a wider reach in real time, and could be accessed by participants on their smartphones/tablets/laptops.

As facilitators, we both have experience of Audience Response systems in our own University teaching. In this regard, we have both previously used TurningPoint, which enables the user to integrate a variety of questions within a Power-point presentation. This has the advantage of prompting a question without switching software during the session. However, Powerpoint itself is a linear programme and questions will appear only when a particular slide is reached.

At the EWRC, *Sli.do* was the chosen response system. *Sli.do* itself is an online system, and requires a switch from Powerpoint to the online portal when the presenter seeks to ask a question. The software is endowed of a user-friendly interface and operated smoothly. It also allowed the facilitator a degree of flexibility in when to ask a question, while the software offers a wider range of questions such as word cloud generators, bar charts, and histograms. It also has a

facility for audience participant to electronically submit real-time questions.

We were required to email the EWRC administration with a set of questions for *Sli.do* a week in advance of the session. In order to familiarise ourselves with the software, we also signed up to a trial version of *Sli.do*. On the day of the session, a *Sli.do* representative also attended to ensure that everything was working properly.

Figure 3. Question on ‘smart specialisation’ definition

In opening the session, we explained we were going to use *Sli.do* and invited the audience to either download the app or access the website. Our first question was then to invite the audience to describe in one word what they understood by the term ‘smart specialisation’. As responses were being received, the word cloud itself was constantly updated, before settling on the core words (Figure 3). Fortunately, the majority of participants had a good grasp of the concept!

Figure 4. Question: Leading regions should do more to collaborate with actors from lagging regions

The other presenters also utilised the software, asking several questions either during or at the end of their presentations. The answers were presented in a variety of formats from simple polls (Figure 4) to more detailed graphics. Just as in the classroom, the interactive nature of Audience polls acted as a prompt to generate wider audience discussion.

In hindsight, the only regret was that while we had quickly been able to get a grip of (and utilise) *Sli.do's* main functions, we were unaware of the facility that enables participants to electronically submit real-time questions. This facility could be useful to ensure greater inclusivity in the session. Nevertheless, overall the session was considered a great success. It was one of most highly attended at the EWRC and the use of both the pre-session survey data and Sli.do generated some wide and lively debate.

Postscript

The use of software such as Power-point has become ***de rigueur*** in professional presentations and university teaching. Yet it can be very linear, and preclude wider audience participation. Indeed, the use of this tool allows presenters to engage with the audience in a more inclusive way, enabling even the most introvert participants to be part of the discussion. Increasingly, bodies such as the EWRC are encouraging organisers of sessions to facilitate more interactive sessions using pre-session surveys and Audience Response systems (such as *Sli.do*). We concur that Audience Response systems both serve a very useful purpose in generating wider insights and lively debate.

Acknowledgments

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