

Report on the Regions in Recovery e-Festival 2022: Special Session 14, March 31st 2022: “Top-down sectoral meets a bottom-up place-based perspective: love at first sight or a marriage of convenience?”



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By Ninetta Chaniotou, Regional Council of Kainuu, Finland

This is a review of the Special Session on “Top-down sectoral meets a bottom-up place-based perspective: love at first sight or a marriage convenience?”, held on 14th March 2022 as part of the Regions in Recovery Festival, organised by the Regional Studies Association. The session was chaired by Dimitri Corpakis of Friends of Smart Specialisation.

Contents of the session

- Setting the scene (Dimitri Corpakis, Friends of Smart Specialisation and Richard Tuffs, Friends of Smart Specialisation).
- Redefining the place-based approach: practice-based insights (Ninetta Chaniotou, Regional Council of Kainuu; Ari Lainevu, Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa, Venla Virkamäki, Regional Council of Helsinki-Uusimaa).
- Coordinating and Competing in Ecosystems: How Regional Governance Shape New EU Missions and ERA Hubs? (Markku Markkula, President of the Helsinki-Uusimaa Region, former President of the European Committee of the Regions and Taina Tukiainen, Professor and Research Director, Vaasa University).
- Top-down meets place-based: Case study on the Mission “Restore our ocean and waters by 2030” (Laura Roman, Technopolis Group).
- Conclusions (Richard Tuffs, Friends of Smart Specialisation).

Insights

The challenge of bottom-up meeting top-down interventions requires that the regional perspectives are integrated into all levels of policy: planning, delivery, monitoring; as a way for more realistic and effective policies. This is a multi-sided issue. The FoSS session presented and discussed several dimensions: strategy, governance, operational issues including field experiences.

(1) *Strategic*: Regional perspectives should be included into EU and national policies at the policy planning and formulation stages, thus ensuring the effectiveness of policy implementation. The relatively recently announced National Recovery Plans are examples of a lack of attention paid to the regional or local levels and this top-down approach may reduce the effectiveness of the policies as national plans may pay little attention to regional smart specialisation strategies. Another example is the new EU instrument to tackle grand societal

challenges. The EU Missions are a “new” and “vital” instrument as stated by the European Commission: “EU Missions are a new way to bring concrete solutions to some of our greatest challenges by delivering concrete results and impact by 2030 by putting research and innovation into a new role, combined with new forms of governance and collaboration, as well as by engaging citizens.” The regional level needs to be a key player in EU policy both at the strategic and operational level. Ambitious EU targets will only be met by highlighting more than so far the role of regions and cities.

(2) *Governance*: To achieve a collaborative approach in bringing together the top-down and bottom-up dimensions, governance provisions should provide for both, regional and interregional spaces. This is possible when similar values have been developed on both sides which enables bridges to be built between the two.

At regional and city levels, it was argued that the overall regional or city context is a “physical, mental and virtual place where technologies and humans co-evolve.” A virtual place is a “place” that is not territorially bound while it is territorially realised. This can be done through innovation system partnerships, where complementary players (wherever they are physically located) can share visions and values, learn together, and contribute to achieving joint and individual goals. European Missions and ERA Hubs can be important instruments for the realisation of this approach. The session argued that a systemic multi-governance approach requires more collaborative experimenting, prototyping, monitoring, and scaling-up activities at all governance levels. Special attention is needed for creating and making visible portfolios of actions both at the EU and regional/local levels and disseminating these effectively in all phases of planning and implementation of the EU policies.

At interregional level, it was argued that RIS3-related, institutionalised, programme-based collaboration agreements between and among regions would be useful for regions to benefit systematically from extended innovation spaces. This would be important for regions lacking sufficient critical mass (economic base), knowledge or innovation infrastructure resources related to their RIS3. This is where mutually beneficial collaborations based on documented national and interregional complementarities and potential would be very important. The new initiatives of European Missions and ERA Hubs might be instrumental in promoting such partnerships. Sharing and encouraging exchange of knowledge and co-creation are pivotal.

It was argued that the system of ERA Hubs could bring missing elements to the European research and education landscapes to create strong EU-oriented knowledge societies throughout Europe and accelerate the transform societies to green, sustainable and digital growth. The ERA Hubs network ideally ensures that local and regional RDI ecosystems become an integrated part of the European-wide RDI ecosystem.

(3) Operational: Identifying and activating interregional complementarities, aiming at better functioning of regional innovation systems and reinforced regional potential, are important tools that can increase the effectiveness of RIS3. Building on RIS3 synergies and complementarities, between and among regions, is one way of addressing this issue. Another way is to identify and explore complementarities through value-chain analysis and associated development options. Concrete approaches for activating interregional complementarities can come, for example, from an active and continual use of the entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) – a key aspect of smart specialisation strategies. The development requires all actors to learn new competencies by integrating technology and research with a human-centric approach, implementing joint green and digital transformation processes, and securing access to the needed resources. The requirements are essential in creating well-functioning local RDI ecosystems. With the help of these, cities and regions can create bench-learning processes and peer networking to use the concepts and solutions of forerunners in smart and sustainable practices.

Access to funding for the organisation and implementation of collaboration schemes on demand, is very important. Reviewed from the regional perspective, the EU financing is too fragmented. Alongside EU programmes, access to funding ensuring continuity and predictability for follow up initiatives should be further ensured.