

European Alliance Against Coronavirus

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The role of clusters in the European Recovery Plans (2)

Working format is based on “Gilles Rules”:

1. conceptual framework
2. needs and disruptions
3. solutions

Speakers:

- Federica Bertamino, National Agency for Territorial Cohesion, Italy
- Gabriela Macoveiu, Regional Development North East of Romania
- Ulla Engelmann, DG GROW

1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Italian national coordination of S3s and the cluster's role

Federica Bertamino from the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion introduced the group to their work on the smart specialisation strategies, which could serve as an example of activities for clusters to move regarding the national recovery plans. In Italy, the smart specialisation has a national and regional dimension, with one national S3 with 5 thematic areas, and 21 regional S3s with different objectives, timing, and approaches. The Italian regions are characterized by different levels of administrative abilities and experience in managing and monitoring R&I policies. Moreover, each Italian region has its own monitoring system following EC regulation. Consequently, it is possible to find different skills and monitoring capabilities as well as different degrees of stakeholder engagement in S3 monitoring.

In June 2016, the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion conducted a survey indicating that the regions would like to receive support for the national coordination activities. This is the reason why the Monitoring Unit of the Agency for Territorial Cohesion gives methodological support to regions for S3 monitoring. They developed a monitoring system at central level containing information on the 21 regional S3s. Furthermore, the National Agency for Territorial Cohesion and State General Account Department launched an activity with regions: identifying S3 projects in the National Monitoring System to identify the projects contributing to regional and national strategies by priority. A continuous insertion of projects into the system allows to gather comparable information for the regions.

For their activities, the clusters define a three-year plan of activity, with a special focus on less developed regions. They can help administrations in reaching firms for more inclusive entrepreneurial discovery process, and they can support regions by mapping opportunities for international collaboration with research and innovation actors, promoting measures to engage regional stakeholders, participating in S3 platforms, and developing EU or international value chains.

Romanian vision for clusters

Gabriela Macoveiu from the Regional Development North East of Romania presented the North East Region's active clusters in Romania in the health, textile, tourism, agriculture and digitalisation ecosystems. In the last years, the connections between the regional and national level have increased. She shared with the participants the Regional Development North East of Romania's vision based on two main ideas:

- Clusters can promote sectorial collaborative leadership
- Clusters can consolidate capacity to:
 1. Support start-ups and scale-up
 2. Simulate international cooperation
 3. Encourage digital transformation

Thus, clusters become a backbone for change strategy for smart specialisation, by contributing to RIS3 NORTH-EAST, engaging in the entrepreneur discovery process, and promoting leadership and collaboration. The main instrument 2021-2027 ROP North-East will include investments in clusters, including investments in start-ups and SMEs to develop competitiveness in specific areas, R&I projects, internationalisation and networking.

Clusters in the recovery plans

At the end of the session, Ulla Engelmann from DG GROW pointed out that clusters have the capability to reach actors and that during these sessions, they played an active role in the identification of disruptions, along with other entities of the Rapid Alert Function. All this work is fundamental to implement innovative proposals. On EU level, the Euroclusters will reinforce the transformation into a greener and more digital economy as well as develop value chains interlinkages in the EU single market.

She pointed out that regions are the base for the Smart Specialisation Strategies, which in return is the basis for discussions on recovery. The colleague on national and regional levels need to know about the capacities of clusters.

2. Needs & challenges

No new disruptions were highlighted during this session. However, some needs and challenges were shared by the speakers:

1. Need to have a **stronger national vision and coordination activities**. It is important to improve the governance with a national vision on what is happening at territorial level: (i) providing comparable information across regions by priority area; (ii) supporting the monitoring and implementation of S3 through capacity building initiatives; (iii) providing a space for peer-exchange and sharing experiences between regions.
2. Linking to the previous point, it is necessary to **identify S3 projects** in a National Monitoring System, **harmonizing priorities across the regions**. The main scope is to identify the projects contributing to regional and national strategies by priority (project financed by national and EU cohesion policies). The main need is to share information with regions, supporting the monitoring and evaluation activities, the revision process, the cooperation between administration and stakeholders, the comparison and benchmarking with other national and EU regions and defining synergies with the national S3.

3. Clusters must be included in **entrepreneurial support**, fostering collaboration between companies, and taking care about new needs and challenges. The challenge is **to increase international cooperation** to consolidate the collaboration between similar cluster of different countries. And at the same time, clusters need more support from regional authorities.
4. The connection between clusters and regional challenges allows to **reinforce the link between EU strategies and leadership and the territorial needs**. In this sense, **S3 must be an integrated part of the Recovery Plan**, rather than a separate solution. In this way, clusters can become (i) the backbone for territorial change strategy, promoting sectorial collaborative leadership and can (ii) consolidate capacity to support start-up and scale-up, stimulate international cooperation, encourage digital transformation.
5. **Investment in clusters**: (i) investments in start-up and SMEs for developing new industrial activities, according to the needs identified in their value chain; (ii) R&I projects; (iii) support for the internationalization and networking.
6. **Improve administrative capacity**: (i) development of skills for smart specialization and industrial transition; (ii) access to one stop-shop for R&I projects preparation; (iii) access to the regional Digital Innovation Hubs.