Smart specialisation and Austria’s Lead Institutions Initiative at public universities

by Armin Mahr

MACRO-REGIONAL INNOVATION WEEK: At the crossroads of three European Macro-Regions: Danube, Adriatic-Ionian and Alpine Regions, Trieste, 27 September 2016
Smart specialisation & Austria

- Early partner of European Commission/JRC’s S3 Platform
- Together with Flanders, Finland: initiator of OECD smart specialisation project
- **RIS3 KEY** brochure as an easy starting and self-assessment tool: download from [www.era.gv.at/regions](http://www.era.gv.at/regions) in 7 languages!
- Ex-ante conditionality (EAC) met with a strategic framework around the Austrian government RTI strategy
- STI strategies in all regions, some showcases, overall growing role of S3
- Autumn 2016: Strat.AT partnership ‘Smart Specialisation’: new publication of national/regional specialisations
- Outlook: Growing regional sensitivity, growing national/regional alignment
- Resume: EAC did not suit Austria, need for a diversified approach, no quick shot, but **long term commitment to Smart Specialisation**
Connecting Triple Helix partners:
- Knowledge sector
- Enterprise sector
- Government sector

Mobilising a Quadruple Helix:
- Knowledge sector
- Enterprise sector
- Government sector
- Users / Civil society

Story: Mobilising the expertise of all Helix partners helps to set the right public investment priorities for regional innovation ecosystem.
Knowledge and HEI are established to last: Less affected by changing economic rationales or business cycle fluctuations, they create persistent values within a region. **Knowledge institutions rarely move their headquarters and research units.**

- (Specific regional) knowledge output, higher education, key partners for enterprises and business sector > enhancing regional innovation potential, high-profile developers of skills and talents, positive image of the region etc.
- Social and demographic effects: access to higher education, social mix, attractiveness of the region for young people, anchors of social innovation
- Direct and indirect economic effects: Employment, income, (inter)national investments and spillovers, employees’ and student’s expenses
- Knowledge is cutting across borders by nature: HEI infuse regional innovation systems with international knowledge and technologies. They are international co-operation hubs for their region and help to bridge existing social, cultural and economic gaps in Europe.

**Smart Specialisation:** Higher education institutions (HEI) need to engage proactively as experts on the regional knowledge capital & frontier and realise their role as regional **Lead Institutions**, on equal terms with **regional policy makers** and the branch **leading companies**, as partners in shaping regional innovation ecosystems.
Rationales:

- Connecting universities with & in their regions
- Developing competitive knowledge places with an international profile
- Empowerment of strategic capacity as international co-operation hubs
- Creating synergies through co-ordination (thematic/location related approaches)
- Planning shift from a mere institutional to a location perspective
HEI locations in Austria: Developing competitive knowledge places

- Proximity (still) matters.
- Connecting regionalisation & internationalisation

Universities of Applied Sciences (FH): Regionalisation of KT activities
**The Lead Institutions Initiative at Austrian universities (2)**

**Instruments:** Performance agreements & Austrian Universities Development Plan 2016-21

**PA 2013-15: Towards regional awareness**
- **Location concepts** (connected with or part of the university’s development plan)
- Active contribution to the regional innovation strategy (RIS3)

**PA 2016-18: Towards regional alignment and communication**
- Location concept update / integration in development plans
- Using regional HEI platforms to develop joint location concepts, reaching out to universities of applied sciences
- Using the concept to communicate a regional knowledge profile

**PA 2019-21: Towards place-based investment**
- Aligning public investment: Intention to base investments on co-ordinated place-based location concepts

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“A location concept (‘Standortkonzept’) is a university’s bridge from local engagement to global competitiveness.”

“In a location concept universities highlight their position within a network of strategic partners in academia, industry and business in a self-chosen surrounding area of close collaboration.”

“Presenting themselves as a clustered habitat or critical mass of excellence rather than a single institution should support them to attract global cooperations and investments.”
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PA 2019-21: Towards place-based investment
- Aligning public investment: Intention to base infrastructure and thematic focus investments on co-ordinated place-based location concepts developed by HEI
Thank you for your attention.

Grazie per l’attenzione | Hvala za vašo pozornost

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