

Annex 1. Synopsis report of stakeholder consultation in view of the Communication on Smart Specialisation

1. Introduction

A stakeholder consultation strategy on Smart Specialisation has been carried out starting in early 2016 and continued till the end of March 2017. The consultation approach facilitated the gathering of expertise and opinions from the main categories of stakeholders of the S3 ecosystems by i) collecting views on the over 120 smart specialisation strategies in EU Member States (MS) and regions, their implementation and evolution; ii) identifying the state of play, challenges, good practices and lessons learnt in smart specialisation since 2010; iii) gathering information on projects and initiatives that follow the smart specialisation approach, and iv) collecting suggestions for future actions / initiatives to help implement the smart specialisation strategies and evolve the concept.

In line with the consultation strategy, input was collected from a wide range of the different actors of the innovation ecosystem in the EU: businesses or business support organisations, national/regional/local public authorities, research and innovation organisations, national and European associations speaking in the name of their members.

The main approaches used to collect input were the following:

- a. the extensive dialogue of Commission services with stakeholders since 2016;
- b. the insights gained thanks to the independent surveys on smart specialisation that the Fraunhofer Institute (ISI) organised in 2014, 2015 and 2016;
- c. the on-line public consultation survey organised by the European Commission between 23 December 2016 and 24 March 2017;
- d. the position papers on smart specialisation received in this context.

Many national and regional authorities responded by contributing their views on S3, its achievements, challenges and perspectives for the future in numerous bilateral meetings with Commission services, including in the course of ESIF programme Monitoring Committees and annual meetings. Other stakeholders responded to the online survey while others sent position papers, and many shared their insights in meetings and conferences, e.g. ERRIN (European Regions Research and Innovation Network), EURADA (European Association of Economic Development Agencies), EBN (network of around 150 quality-certified business and innovation centres), European Cluster Alliance, IASP (International Association of Science Parks), UAS4Europe (Universities of applied Sciences for Europe).

This synopsis summarizes the various contributions received and based on the analysis of this input identifies the key messages derived and the areas of improvement proposed for the next steps of the smart specialisation agenda. The detailed results of the consultation strategy are presented with the corresponding graphs and data in the document: "**Summary of the public consultation on Smart Specialisation**".

2. Consultation activities and other information sources

i) Dialogue with stakeholders

Extensive dialogue of the Commission services with stakeholders took place in a range of seminars, workshops and conferences since 2016 and important feedback was received and compiled from over 20 events, including those organised by the S3Platform with its over 170 registered members from national and regional administrations. The major events considered are listed below:

- **1-2 June 2016** Smart Regions Conference (Brussels)
- **8-10 June 2016** The Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE) 2016 Eindhoven (NL)
- **19-20 September 2016** Be Smart, Think Blue Brokerage events for regions interested in Blue economy Gdansk (PL)
- **28-30 September 2016** 1st SMARTER Conference on Smart Specialisation and Territorial Development Seville (ES)
- **10-13 October 2016** European Week of Regions and Cities Brussels (BE)
- **18-19 October 2016** Thematic University – Business Forum, building Euroregional Ecosystem San Sebastián (SP)
- **20 October 2016** Digitising European Industry Working group meetings on Digital Innovation Hubs (BE)
- **8-9 November 2016** Smart Specialisation workshop at 7th Strategic Forum for the EUSBSR Stockholm (SE)
- **30 November - 2 December 2016** The European Cluster Conference Brussels (BE)
- **31 January/1February 2017** Stakeholder event in Essen (DE)
- **March 2017** Industrial Modernisation Conference (Brussels)
- **8 March 2017** Stairways to Excellence (Brussels)
- **6-7 April 2017** University – Business Forum (Brussels)
- **KEP – Knowledge Exchange Platform**
- **Innovation Camps:** 30 May 2016 – Amsterdam; 6-7 July 2016 Bratislava and 1-2 October 2016 Gabrovo (Bulgaria)
- European Committee of the Regions (CoR) opinion on "Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3): impact for regions and inter-regional cooperation":
- **15 December 2016** – CoR stakeholder consultation and an exchange of views on "Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3): impact for regions and inter-regional cooperation"- **31 January 2017** – Discussion and adoption in the SEDEC Commission
- **22-23 March 2017** – Discussion and adoption in CoR plenary

ii) Fraunhofer Institute Studies – Targeted Survey 2016

Since 2013, the Fraunhofer Institute for System and Innovation research (ISI) has conducted annual surveys of policy maker's perception of the European Commission's S3 agenda. The latest one of 2016 focuses on taking a first look backward and appraise which lasting changes the S3 agenda may have brought in regional or national innovation policies, in particular as regards the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) (2016)¹. The survey link was sent out to more than 1200 contacts of which 113 answered completely and 66 partially. The survey achieved a good coverage of regions and Member States in a geographical sense, receiving input from more than 50% of all managing authorities across Europe.

In summary, the study produced reflection on the current status quo of RIS3 policy in regional policy as is, identified obstacles on the way to what was originally intended and proposed informed policy conclusions with respect to further steps on the way to developing policies in support of smart specialisation in the coming years.

iii) Open Public Consultation

A public on-line consultation on Smart Specialisation Strategies² was conducted by the Commission using the EU Survey website. The on-line survey was a semi-structured survey carried out during a 3 months period between December 2016 and March 2017, with the aim of providing input to the *Commission Communication on Smart Specialisation (S3)* scheduled for mid-2017. The respondents were innovation stakeholders in the EU with a critical role in making innovation happen in regional / national level.

The questionnaire consisted of 10 specific questions (with several sub-questions) and was designed with a view of achieving a good balance (60/40) between closed (multiple choice) questions and open (free text) questions. The aim was to receive structured information while at the same time gather suggestions and comments that could prove valuable in the process of preparation of the S3 Communication and the accompanying Staff Working Document.

Closed questions focused on receiving input in the following areas:

- The need for smart specialisation: approach, preconditions for effective investments, objectives, overall assessment of achievements.
- Impact of S3 on national and regional research and innovation systems.
- Cooperation of actors in the R&I eco-systems and the level of their involvement in the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP) and the design and/or implementation of R&I strategies.
- Funding from EU programmes / EU required support to interregional cooperation.

The open questions focused to select free text information on:

¹ The full results are published here:

<http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/documents/20182/196760/Policy+Brief+on+Smart+Specialisation/938913ba-040f-4d67-bb07-383e45ffaf0b>

² https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/smart_spec_consult

- Ideas on tailoring support to develop regional capacity.
- Suggestions / comments on facilitating innovation investment including across borders.
- Research and innovation project examples implemented during the last 3 years.

237 responses were received of which more than 68% responded as representatives of their organisations and covering 24 Members States (MS). The highest number of responses came from Italy (34), followed by Spain (24), Poland (21) and France (21). There were 2 responses from Estonia, Ireland, Lithuania, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom and only one response from Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, and Malta. There were no respondent organisation originating from Cyprus, Denmark, Hungary and Luxembourg.

As regards the profile of the respondents 37% of respondents come from regional authorities and national administration, 20% from public and private business or innovation support bodies, 16% from higher education institutions and research bodies, 12% are from the private sector (firms of all sizes) and 11% from non-governmental organisations. Regarding their role in innovation, respondents considered themselves as innovators (24%) or support providers for innovation (60%) or both (13%). 72% of the respondents consider themselves as very knowledgeable regarding S3.

iv. Position papers

Besides the responses to the on-line questionnaire, the Commission also received 6 position papers on smart specialisation providing substantial contribution to the consultation process from the following organisations:

- **EURADA** (European Association of Development Agencies)
- **Vanguard Initiative** (30 most innovative regions in the EU)
- **ERRIN** (European Regions Research and Innovation Network)
- **North Middle Sweden Region** (The NUTS2 area “North Middle Sweden” consists of three regions: Värmland, Dalarna and Gävleborg)
- **UAS4EUROPE** (Universities of Applied Sciences for Europe)
- **French authorities**

As regards the roadmap for the Communication on Smart Specialisation "*A fresh approach to the European growth and jobs through regional research and innovation strategies*" DG REGIO has not received any input.

3. Results and contribution to policy-making

The consultation activities have revealed a clear consensus among the stakeholders on the crucial elements of interest that the consultation strategy on Smart Specialisation aimed to gather feedback such as: significance and objectives of S3, the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process (EDP), impact on R&I support, cooperation among different stakeholders in the

innovation eco-systems, interregional cooperation and S3, suggestions and recommendations for policy support and the future of the smart specialisation agenda.

Most of the following aspects/suggestions raised by stakeholders per topic of interest of the consultation have been reflected in the framework outlined in the Communication while more detailed analysis of each of the stakeholders' group contribution to the consultation can be found in the document "[Summary of the public consultation on Smart specialisation](#)".

i) Objectives & Significance of Smart Specialisation

Overall trend: Smart specialisation has gained ground and interest; it is considered important and can be used as a lever for the creation of jobs and growth in Member States / Regions. It is seen as a policy concept that can renovate and mobilise the regional innovation ecosystems and it should be maintained and supported by the EU in the future.

Stakeholders in discussions in various events highlighted **the persistent strong interest in S3, the need to continue with the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process during the implementation of the S3 strategies and their evolution all along the implementation period.** It was acknowledged that the ex-ante conditionality status given to the S3 concept speeded up its roll-out on the ground and went in most MS and regions clearly beyond a pure "paper-filling" exercise for ex-ante conditionality compliance. A tangible impact of S3 mentioned was on the governance of innovation related policies which marked in many cases a fresh start for innovation policy in regions and some Member States. For many regional authorities S3 helped also to strengthen the role and potential of regions in innovation policy by acknowledging the need to take place-based specificities in industrial structures, research and human capital better into account when designing and implementing support policies for innovation and competitiveness. However the need for closer collaboration among research, innovation, industry and regional development policies, also at EU level, were also noted in the discussions. The S3 concept was also increasingly accepted in academic debates, noting that this was **a large scale policy experiment that took place unusually quickly** after the coining of the concept of smart specialisation.

The results of the on-line public consultation survey were in the same line indicating the main objective of S3 to be **a lever for the creation of jobs through place-based research innovation investments in their Member State/ Region** (84%). Making business and researchers have investment projects together (72%) and foster the economic transformation of the region (e.g. towards new sectors) (68%), as well as increasing Research & Development expenditure (64%) were also rated highly in importance. S3 is considered conducive to attract innovative entities to the regions through innovation facilities (63%). With regard to the significance of S3 **the vast majority of respondents value the bottom-up approach** and consider that it is important for MS or regions to put in place S3 with clear priorities upon which business, academic and public stakeholders are consulted in advance of allocating funding (94%).

Stakeholders that sent position papers **consider Smart specialisation as a very positive agenda that should be maintained in the future:** EURADA's overall assessment of the

Smart Specialisation Strategies is extremely positive as they consider it essential for future EU policies for economic growth and propose that it should be placed on the highest level of the political agenda of the EU Institutions. They highlight though that the complex governance of Smart Specialisation requires continuous policy support. Moreover they consider that Smart Specialisation should be deployed in all territorial levels, including cities as they have the appropriate size to establish a good prioritisation. For ERRIN S3 is an effective tool for regional development while the North Middle Sweden Regions considers that Smart specialisation has proven to be an effective and transformative tool, successful in refining priorities and achieving a more long-term and systematic approach to R&I policy. UAS4EUROPE considers that smart specialisation approach should continue to be supported and if managed well it can improve the R&I processes and lead to both economic and social growth. Finally the French Authorities, although it is too early in their view to measure results, they mention several positive effects such as: 1) The positioning and visibility of regional innovation ecosystems are strengthened, and exchanges facilitated, 2) Smart Specialisation strategies act as a consolidating tool to strengthen French research and innovation policies.

The *Communication* reflects the above mentioned strong interest on Smart Specialisation, recognizes its contribution to the quality of cohesion policy investments in innovation and entrepreneurship and its value added approach to the EU's innovation eco-system while at the same time proposes actions and recommendations for improvement.

ii) Impact of S3 on the R&I regional support systems

Overall trend: *Although it is early to report tangible results some impact has been already perceived in the quality and range of R&I support systems in MS / Regions during the last 3 years in a larger extend in the Northern & Western Europe MS and in a smaller but noticeable extend in the Mediterranean and Central & Eastern Europe MS / Regions.*

Input analysed into the Fraunhofer study suggests that changes in the innovation support system are happening, but are limited and evolutionary, while at the same time the potential of universities as regional innovation and change agents is not yet sufficiently developed.

Stakeholders that responded to the online public consultation regarding the impact of S3 on the R&I regional / national support systems suggest that they noticed a visible impact on the quality and range of R&I support over the last 3 years (59% of the respondents). Respondents from Northern and Western EU countries perceived a bigger impact (65%) than those from the Mediterranean countries (56%) while in the Central and Eastern European countries over half of the respondents declare that they noticed an impact of S3 in the past 3 years. In particular some improvements were noted as regards support to **business development** via networking and cooperation, and support to business plan development, **support to innovation projects**, in particular via support to industrial research, design and creative thinking, **improved R&I infrastructure** access to FabLabs, LivingLabs or other experimentation support, **better access to researchers** and better cooperation between stakeholders to identify relevant skills needs. **Improvements are less visible with regard to access to financial instruments** (loans, venture capital, equity, guarantees), requirements as

regards project durability in time and reporting and other administrative requirements. Also support to intellectual property rights management has not improved much. The same goes for the regulatory environment, such as time and cost of the set-up of firms or obtaining permits, and the ability to participate in assessing the impact of legislative proposals.

The *Communication* is stressing the diversity of Europe's regions and recognises the need to further address the specific needs especially of regions in industrial transition and low growth - low income regions such as in many South and Eastern European MS and proposes specific actions for the EC and recommendations for the MS to further increase the impact.

iii) Cooperation among different stakeholders in the innovation eco-systems

Overall trend: Wider implication of stakeholders in the S3 and its implementation is considered important with more SMEs and intermediaries participating and with the further development of the potential of Universities as regional innovation and change agents. There is some evidence of improved cooperation between different stakeholders in the innovation eco-systems mainly as regards cooperation with Higher Education Institutions and with Clusters or Business associations.

Responses to the Fraunhofer survey on this issue suggest that the potential of universities as regional innovation and change agents is not yet sufficiently developed. They stress that, overall, universities play the strongest role as representatives of their own interests and providers of knowledge; their role in developing strategies or adding momentum to collaborative research and training efforts are more limited. The sometimes suggested entrepreneurial function and interregional integration capacity, in contrast, are not very common.

In the online consultation as regards the interaction and openness to cooperate among different stakeholders in the innovation eco-systems, the results suggest that over the past 3 years thanks to the S3 the interactions have improved. More than half of stakeholders with the role of **innovators** observed an improved cooperation with Higher Education Institutions (76%), clusters and business associations (66%), consultancy firms (64%), IT service providers (55%), multinational firms (53%), and research service providers. Also the cooperation with clients of innovative solutions (feed-back, co-design) increased for 52% of the respondents. These observations coincide largely with those stakeholders with the role of **innovation support providers**. They also noted improvements in cooperation with domestic manufacturing firms (62%). By contrast they saw less improvement in cooperation with clients of innovative solutions. The improvements in terms of innovation eco-systems were **less pronounced** as regards cooperation with marketing or design firms, private investors, technology brokers and patent lawyers / advisors. There also seem to be **still too few improvements** as regards cooperation with **foreign manufacturing firms and research service providers**.

In the position papers **the relevant stakeholders recognise the role of S3 to mobilise innovation stakeholders and welcome wider participation of stakeholders as part of S3 design and implementation:** For EURADA, ERRIN and North Middle Sweden Regions

there is a consensus about the suitability of S3 to engage a wide range of stakeholders in a common transformation agenda. For ERRIN the role of universities and also RTOs within smart specialisation at the regional level is also important and should be reinforced as key actors developing a ‘connected region’. They also stress the role of new intermediaries such as ‘innovation brokers, orchestrators, facilitators’ who can play an active role in building regional research and innovation ecosystems. Moreover strengthen training and professional qualifications and the development of new competences as smart specialisation requires new ‘intermediary’ competences at the regional level and developing stronger engagement of the Enterprise Europe Network. Vanguard Initiative highlights that capacity and capability that exist within large scale initiatives like JTI’s or PPP’s should be connected with regional actors to address societal challenges, developing innovative ideas from a bottom-up approach.

The *Communication* takes into account the mentioned weaknesses and the unbalanced participation of the different actors in regional / national eco-systems and suggests the continuation of reforming efforts in order to address the R&I challenges while at the same time it proposes specific actions for the EC and recommendations for the MS.

iv) Interregional collaboration

Overall trend: *Interregional cooperation is seen in a large extend as strategic and very important in the framework of S3 but regions are facing constraints. There is a clear demand for interregional support initiatives in the framework of S3 supported by the EC to build collaborations and open innovation networks around shared strategic interest and shared priorities.*

In the extensive dialogue with stakeholders during meetings, workshops and events **the need for more inter-regional cooperation** was a recurrent issue and combined with the call for different support as currently offered under Macro-regional strategies, INTERREG, COSME or Horizon2020. In particular they propose that it should be more based on a preparatory phase that allows for the teaming up of regions and clusters with related S3 priorities along value chains and in view of concrete investment projects.

In the Fraunhofer survey respondents consider **inter-regional cooperation as an opportunity**. More chances are seen in interregional collaboration, than in coordination of funding across different regions and MS. It is highlighted that interregional collaboration is still typically without budget and dominantly covered through INTERREG.

In the online public consultation stakeholders confirmed in a large majority of 86% that developing interregional cooperation within the framework of S3 is important. 59% of the respondents have been directly involved or observed concrete, strategic interregional cooperation between their region and other regions with similar or related S3. Nevertheless constraints to inter-regional cooperation were identified and reported with the most important ones being the inward looking approach in designing S3 (32%) and the difficulty to engage business in interregional cooperation (27%). Additionally difficulties to identify other regions with similar or related strategies are mentioned while some respondents perceive other

regions as not open to inter-regional cooperation. **The need for additional EU support for inter-regional cooperation** for finding new business and/or research partners from abroad and reducing the innovation gap between less and more developed Member States/Regions was expressed clearly in the survey results.

In the position papers **there was a clear consensus that interregional cooperation opportunities offered by S3 should be further exploited and supported by the Commission**: EURADA considers smart specialisation as a good opportunity for interregional cooperation. Vanguard Initiative proposes that the EC should create the conditions for building collaboration and open innovation networks around shared strategic interests and shared priorities. They stress that the role that clusters can play as bridges between actors within regions and outside, as channels for business support to SMEs, should be reflected in EU policies. ERRIN estimates that Peer Reviews conducted by the S3 Platform and the tools developed to better identify priorities have helped regions to great extent. They consider that value chains can be further developed thanks to the Vanguard Initiative and the Smart specialisation Thematic Platforms. Moreover supporting collaboration among regions should be developed, with adequately funded future Interreg - Europe programme and strategic cluster partnership programmes. According to the FRENCH AUTHORITIES it is important to facilitate inter-regional cooperation through cross-border programmes or other initiatives. Additionally they think that exchanges between leading and less developed regions should be further supported as well as smart specialisation by thematic domains.

In line with the above considerations increasing interregional cooperation is considered as a key issue in the *Communication* and concrete actions for the EC and the MS are proposed to develop strategic interregional common projects, to facilitate transnational investments and foster cross-regional partnering and access to competences.

v) Synergies and complementarities between funds

Overall trend: Synergies and complementarities between different funds are considered important but they are not yet widely developed. Their development face several challenges with most important one the simplification and harmonisation of regulation and funding rules notably regarding synergies between H2020 and ESIF funding and equal treatment regarding State aid rules.

During the dialogue with stakeholders the issue of **complementarities and synergies across EU programmes and national funds emerged frequently**. Difficulties and remaining challenges for innovation stakeholders were reported often related both to a revamp of the programme rules and regulations, and the need to modify the General Block Exemption Regulation for state aid as regards R&I measures funded from ESI Funds to ensure equal treatment with Horizon 2020 funded projects. Also the need to professionalise and improve regional and national innovation support policy mixes and delivery mechanisms were raised, in particular in cases when the "silos" between research and business were not sufficiently broken up.

In the online survey participants have also highlighted the importance of synergies and complementarities between various EU support schemes and funding in the current EU programmes. The results of the consultation show that some improvement has been already achieved, as 60% of those that received funding or other support from more than one EU fund or programme in the past 3 years **benefited from synergies or a combination of different funds**. 37% acknowledge that the different EU support or funding was mutually supportive and improved or expanded the impact of the activity.

In the position papers stakeholders have expressed a clear need to modernise innovation support at regional, national and EU level and to optimise synergies, complementarities and combination of different sources of support. The need that ESIF should benefit from the same state aid rules as directly managed EU funds was recurrently mentioned. For instance, EURADA, ERRIN and UAS4EUROPE mention that better alignment between different funds should be available for regional players. The wish for better synergies applies also within the different ESI Funds. The French Authorities highlight the need for coordination between ESIF and H2020 to ensure a continuum from upstream research (ERDF allows for the funding of strategic infrastructure) to innovation. In terms of coordination of European funds (ESIF, H2020) 4 obstacles are identified by the French Authorities: i) State aid rules variation between ESIF and H2020 projects, ii) The harmonisation of eligibility criteria and expenditure justification between ESIF and other EU programmes would facilitate stakeholders' ownership, iii) The difficulty for regions to identify and follow (potential) H2020 beneficiaries, in particular unsuccessful candidates, in order to support them in improving their applications, iv) The limited scope of the "Seal of Excellence" tool for funding agencies: State aid rules application to SMEs Phase 2 projects is a barrier to its promotion. The Vanguard Initiative promotes the idea of developing appropriate funding tools, funding mixes, and innovative use of funds that enable the support of industry-led pilots, networks of demonstrators and that the most promising innovative projects should be central to the EU's work. ERRIN highlights that the plethora of funding programmes is often perceived as bewildering for regional actors.

In line with above mentioned considerations and proposals the *Communication* proposes concrete actions for the EC in view to further facilitate and clarify the combined use of ESIF and H2020 and provides certain recommendations to MS.

vi) Policy support

Overall trend: *Policy support for S3 and the EDP in the implementation phase is considered important and recurrently required especially by regional authorities in order to make a success out of S3. Most mentioned support types are: further training, sharing of good practice examples, peer review exercises, benchmarking and mentoring to accompany the implementation of S3.*

During the extensive dialogue with stakeholders **the wish for continued and improved Commission support for S3 mutual learning was mentioned frequently related to** better implementation together with the need for support for building administrative capacity, and the need for monitoring and data collection.

The Fraunhofer report stresses the need to evolve S3 based on monitoring results but at the same time capacity and quality of monitoring needs attention.

During the public online consultation the stakeholders proposed types of support they would need in the S3 implementation. A significant part recommended **further training, sharing of good practice examples, peer review exercises, benchmarking and mentoring to accompany the implementation of S3**, notably in the domains of (i) Awareness-raising of the benefits of S3 (ii) Capacity-building (iii) Monitoring, (iv) Help understand regulations, (v) Sectoral expertise and (vi) Skills. Moreover, respondents ask for **support to foster interregional cooperation and networking**. They seek to consolidate communities of practice, notably through the activities of the S3 Platform of DG JRC. The ability to identify potential partners to develop joint projects is recognised as important. In addition, it is worth noting that many stakeholders have underlined their wish to work with regions with similar level of development. Respondents asked for the **promotion of partnerships between research and industry at both regional and international level**. Furthermore, **forecasting technology and market trends is seen as crucial** for a good definition and assessment of priorities, and a clear understanding of technology evolution along different fields. Market-oriented support is needed to stimulate interregional cooperation and joint projects within the framework of value chains. **Simplification of regulation and funding rules**, notably regarding synergies between Horizon 2020 and ESIF funding and equal treatment regarding State aid rules is highlighted.

Finally in the position papers the need for continued policy support for S3 governance, implementation and monitoring was stressed: Innovative ways of monitoring, capturing not just output but also short- and long-term effects is advocated. Too much focus on short-term indicators, such as new jobs, growth and new firms, may cause an unbalanced search for quick fixes and quick results (North Middle Sweden Region). They also consider multi-level governance important in order to improve cooperation between different stakeholders in the innovation eco-system: Direct dialogue with the Commission at the regional level is very much appreciated, notably with DGs REGIO, GROW, DG RTD and DG JRC. It is advocated that the European Commission also maintain a dialogue with the Member States on how the national level can support regional work on smart specialisation

The Vanguard Initiative proposes that EU policies should further address investor-readiness issues like the protection and sharing of intellectual property rights, the management of data, the development of business cases, the appropriate funding mix and innovative use of funds that enable the support of industry-led pilots as well as the identification of the skills and expertise needed.

The *Communication* proposes to maintain and reinforce policy support offered by the EC via the existing and new tools such as the Smart Specialisation (S3) Platform, the thematic platforms, the TAIEX exchanges, new pilot actions, the development of a network of Digital Innovation Hubs and more.