



S3 Forum Report

28 November 2023

S3 CoP Secretariat

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Introduction and context

On the 28th of November 2023, the highly anticipated S3 Forum took place at the historic venue "[La Llotja de Mar](#)" in Barcelona, hosted by Generalitat de Catalunya place in the context of the [S3 Community of Practice \(S3 CoP\)](#), the European Commission's major source of support for implementation of smart specialisation strategies (S3). The S3 CoP offers a unique platform for S3 practitioners, experts, policymakers, and other key stakeholders to participate in a bottom-up and region-centric network. It encourages discussions on S3 policy and implementation and facilitates the exchange of valuable information and best practices.

Against this backdrop, the S3 Forum offered stakeholders a unique opportunity to network, discuss S3 implementation, and exchange insights and best practices. This year's Forum held particular significance, marking the first EU-level, in-person gathering on S3 since the 2020 pandemic. The S3 Forum addressed both the strategic and regulatory aspects of S3 policy making. Reflections on the evolution of Smart Specialisation and its ability to address emerging challenges were framed against the key structural elements of S3. For more details please visit: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/policy/communities-and-networks/s3-community-of-practice/s3_forum_en

The following document presents the report of the event including:

- Notes from the sessions, including the parallel sessions
- Results of the satisfaction survey

Agenda

8:00 – 9:00	Registration and welcome coffee
9:00 – 9:30	Welcome and introduction <i>(Session with online streaming)</i> Catherine Wendt (Host), Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission Manuel Szapiro , Head of Representation of the European Commission in Barcelona Natàlia Mas , Regional Minister of Economy and Finance, Generalitat de Catalunya
9:30 – 10:20	Panel on Smart Specialisation in a changing world <i>(Session with online streaming)</i> Catherine Wendt , Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission Fernando Merida , Member of the Cabinet of the Secretary for Innovation, Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation Aleix Cubells , General Director of European Funds of the Catalan Government Thomas Wobben , Director of Legislative Works for the COTER, ECON and SEDEC commissions, Committee of the Regions <i>Moderator: Elisabetta Marinelli, S3 CoP Secretariat</i>

10:20 – 10:40	<p>Presentation of the latest developments in the S3 Community of Practice</p> <p><i>(Session with online streaming)</i></p> <p>Elisabetta Marinelli and Els Van de Velde, S3 CoP Secretariat</p>
10:40 – 11:00	Coffee break & networking
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Parallel sessions on experiences and activities related to Smart Specialisation Strategies implementation</p> <p><i>(all parallel sessions are only presential)</i></p>
<p><i>Parallel session 1: S3 and industrial transition</i></p> <p>Pirkko Taskinen, Director of OIA Water Ecosystem & SuperIoT, University of Oulu, Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland</p> <p>Claire Nauwelaers, Independent Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Expert</p> <p>Luis Goñi Navarro, Regional Strategy Director, Sodena Development Agency of Navarra, Spain</p> <p>Marek Przeor, Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission</p> <p><i>Moderator: Yari Borbon, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 2: Community Building and the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process</i></p> <p>Cristian Otgon, Head of Smart Specialisation Department, North-West Regional Development Agency, Romania</p> <p>Elfi Goesaert, R&D Researcher, VITO, Flanders, Belgium</p> <p>Rasmus Bergander, Policy Advisor, Central Sweden European Office, Sweden</p> <p>Tomáš Holinka, Head of S3 Strategy Unit, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czechia</p> <p><i>Moderator: Lena Tsipouri, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 3: From Local Strengths to Interregional Cooperation</i></p> <p>Aitor Mintegui, EU Affairs Officer, Basque Country Delegation to the EU, Spain</p> <p>Pirita Lindholm, Director, ERRIN</p> <p>Richard Tuffs, Friends of Smart Specialisation</p> <p>Marc Pattinson, Senior thematic expert, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform</p> <p><i>Moderator: Els Van de Velde, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 4: Experiences monitoring and evaluating S3 performance</i></p> <p>Tatiana Fernández, Head of Economic Strategy, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain</p> <p>Ieva Gurklyte, R&D&I coordinator of ICT Lab division, Lithuania</p> <p>Jennifer Maria Grisorio, Head of Research and Education System, ARTI- Puglia, Italy</p> <p>Alexandra Avdeenko, Evaluation Specialist, Finance, Competitiveness, and Innovation, World Bank</p> <p>Gabriela Macoveiu, Director for Communication, Innovation, and External Cooperation, North-East Regional Development Agency, Romania</p> <p><i>Moderator: Daniela Kretz, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch & networking
14:00 – 15:30	<p>Parallel sessions on experiences and activities related to Smart Specialisation Strategies implementation</p> <p><i>(all parallel sessions are only presential)</i></p>
<p><i>Parallel session 5: Driving Innovation Diffusion and Digitalisation Trends</i></p> <p>Thomas Wobben, Director of Legislative Works for the COTER, ECON and SEDEC Commissions, Committee of the Regions</p> <p>Vincenzina Cristofaro, Project Manager, Direzione Generale Università, Ricerca, Innovazione, Lombardy, Italy</p>	

<p>Daniel Všeťečka, Director of Digital Economy and Smart Specialisation department, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czechia Kerstin Koren, Head of Department of Economy, Tourism and Technology, Office of the Lower Austrian Government, Austria <i>Moderator: Susana Elena Perez, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 6: Improving Regional Research and Innovation Systems</i> Stephan Satijn, Regional Minister for Economy, Finances, Business Operations and Public Affairs, Province of Limburg, the Netherlands Katalin Kovacs, Senior Consultant, Innomine, Hungary Eva Damm, Policy Officer Research and Science, Culture and Tourism, Free State of Saxony, Germany Magdalena Cymerys, Policy Officer, DG RTD, European Commission <i>Moderator: Alasdair Reid, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 7: S3 Governance: Evolving Structures and Challenges</i> Karolina Lipinska, Deputy Director, Department for Economic Development, Office of the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, Pomorskie, Poland Valeria Bandini, Head of Europe and International Area of ART-ER, Emilia Romagna, Italy Sander Van der Molen, Partner Innovation & Funding, Civitta Florence Hennart, Senior advisor in the Economic Policy Directorate at the Walloon administration for Economy, Employment and Research, Wallonia, Belgium <i>Moderator: Matthieu Lacave, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
<p><i>Parallel session 8: Fostering interregional collaboration through S3 Thematic Platforms and Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)</i> Ramunas Linartas, Policy officer, Smart and Sustainable Growth Unit, DG REGIO, European Commission Wim De Kinderen, Programme Director European Affairs, Brainport Eindhoven EU Office, Netherlands Rene Wijlens, Executive director, Cluster Sports & Technology/EPSE, Eindhoven, Netherlands Marisa Fernandez, Cluster Manager ZINNAE, Spain <i>Moderator: Els Van de Velde, S3 CoP Secretariat</i></p>	
15:30 – 16:00	Coffee break & networking
16:00 – 16:30	Outcomes from the parallel sessions <i>(Session with online streaming)</i>
16:30 – 17:00	Conclusions and takeaways for practitioners and closing <i>(Session with online streaming)</i> Teresa Riesgo , General Secretary for Innovation of the Spanish Government Tatiana Fernández , Head of Economic Strategy, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain Miquel Royo Secretary for the Government's Foreign Action and the European Union Generalitat de Catalunya Catherine Wendt , Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission (closing remarks)
17:30 – 19:00	Networking cocktail

Morning plenary

Welcome and introduction

- **Catherine Wendt (Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission)** welcomed participants to the S3 Forum, the key event of S3 CoP, and presented the CoP as the one-stop shop for S3, bringing practitioners and experts together to discuss the latest developments. S3 continues to be the key instrument to foster development, enabling regions to focus on strengths. S3 Thematic Platforms and Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships are working in key technology areas for the green and digital transition. The strength of S3 is the focus on localisation, prioritisation, and participation. The S3 Forum has multiple aims: to promote information exchange and networking, encouraging regions to take an active role; to update the European Commission policy, informing about recent developments on industrial policy; and to create a community encompassing the European Commission and stakeholders. Smart Specialisation continues to be relevant, and its role needs to be re-examined, to make it better equipped to tackle current challenges, including the innovation divide.
- **Manuel Szapiro (Head of Representation of the European Commission in Barcelona)** underlined that S3 matters even beyond the S3CoP, as it can bring the best of industrial innovation and cohesion policy, promoting industrial and regional resilience, maximising assets and capacity, creating synergies between strengths of EU regions, and accelerating the integration of EU value chains through TSSPs. He recognised the relevance of celebrating the S3 Forum in Barcelona, hosted by Generalitat Catalunya, the historical legacy of the venue can inspire to build a strong network. Catalunya is a frontrunner in deploying industrial innovation, it is a strong innovator and is leading the speed of delivery of the Next Generation EU funds. He reminded that in the future, they will discuss a possible pilot on blending of EU funds with Catalunya, and that the EU investment forum will be organised in Catalunya.
- **Natàlia Mas (Regional Minister of Economy and Finance, Generalitat de Catalunya)** gave a welcome from the Catalan Government and reminded the audience of the most pressing challenges: the climate crisis, reflecting on Catalunya, suffering from draughts; the increase in inequality, to be tackled by building an inclusive social model allowing growth for all people and territories; and the digital transition, which can lead to efficiency gains, and it will be crucial to keep a global competitive position of the EU. To tackle these challenges, society will go through four transitions: democratic, green, social, and digital. S3 can be a key instrument to implement more systemic answers and work together with civil society, stakeholders, and academia. She reminded of Catalunya's commitment on these aspects and the dedication to continue on this path, supporting S3 and developing solutions to social and economic challenges.

Panel on Smart Specialisation in a changing world

Elisabetta Marinelli (S3 CoP Secretariat) asks the audience two questions via Slido

- Q: Where are you joining us from?
 - A: There was a wide representation of EU regions

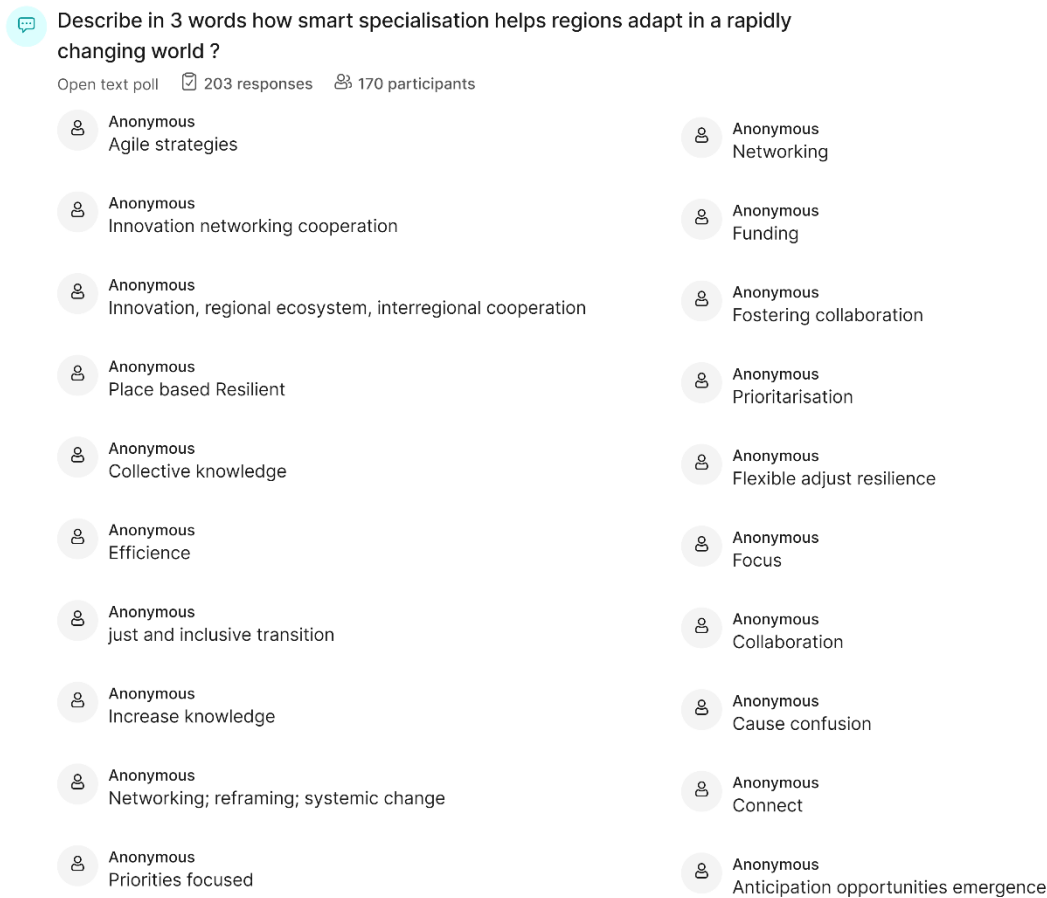
Figure 1: Sli.do word cloud illustrating regional participation



Source: sli.do poll during S3 Forum

- Q: Describe in three words how S3 helps regions adapt in a rapidly changing world:
 - Innovation, collaboration, focus, cooperation, and resources were among the most popular words. A clear interest emerges in interregional cooperation, co-creation, and collaboration, which are all at the core of S3.

Figure 2: Sli.do extract of responses to the question 'Describe in three words how smart specialisation helps regions adapt in a rapidly changing world?'



Source: sli.do poll during S3 Forum

The panel discussion focused on smart specialisation in a changing world. In doing so, the following elements were discussed:

- Catherine Wendt (Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission)** in her interventions underlined the current challenges deriving from a change of political priorities, demographic change, covid pandemic, and the Russian aggression in Ukraine. In an adapting world, regions can use their innovation potential to deal with change and benefit from local development. Regions need to identify and focus investment on their strengths, to allow industrial modernisation to drive the economic transformation.

Smart Specialisation has always been able to adapt to a changing world and will continue to do so. Three things have emerged from the last decade: S3 continues to be a key tool to bridge the innovation divide, the EU will not develop if all regions are not advancing, if some are lagging behind; the core issue for S3 is implementation on the ground, with an emphasis on good governance practices, capacity building, and cross-border collaboration; ensure that Smart Specialisation Strategies stays relevant and can adapt to

changing situation, that's why we are putting more emphasis on fostering solid monitoring and evaluation of S3.

- **Fernando Merida (Member of the Cabinet of the Secretary for Innovation, Spanish Ministry for Science and Innovation)** mentioned governance as the most difficult aspect in the entire process, as good governance is needed at all phases of S3. In Spain at the beginning of S3 programming, difficulties emerged in the coordination between government levels: it was necessary to work at the same time in a horizontal coordination mechanism and to use vertical instruments to coordinate all the policies. To achieve optimal internal and external coordination of the S3 process, the key elements are patience, time, confidence and trust between the different parts. In Spain, a new reformed law on innovation was introduced to address global changes and challenges, aiming at improving innovation ecosystems and strengthening Spanish capacity of knowledge transfer and circulation. Science technology and innovation council activities were boosted, and new elements were introduced, including living labs, sand boxes, and test beds. Fernando concluded that S3 allows to connect local regional challenges with other regions with similar processes to develop joint processes, this is a key approach that can reinforce the EU as a whole.
- **Alex Cubells (General Director of European Funds of the Catalan Government)** discussed that S3 allows regions to focus on the identified strengths and challenges, and it also allows to connect global challenges at the local level. The key instrument for S3 coordination is the shared agenda, an instrument that requires all actors to work in the same direction and is based on stakeholder engagement to ensure that no element from the S3 framework is left behind. A pressing challenge is to put into practice research outcomes, to be better integrated in companies to innovate production. Moreover, it emerges that policies need to be sufficiently comprehensive in covering all the challenges, but avoid being overly complicated, as it hinders practical implementation.
- **Thomas Wobben (Director of Legislative Works for the COTER, ECON and SEDEC commissions, Committee of the Regions)** highlighted that regulatory change arising from digital transition and climate change is having concrete effects right now. There is fragmentation, caused by different innovation programmes at EU level. "What" to do is clear, "how" to do it is the challenge at local level. Ownerships is also needed from the top, from clusters, universities, companies, which in turns need the means to finance diffusion and public recruitment. On the future of Cohesion policy, he stated that strong S3 needs strong cohesion policy. He presented three core themes for the future of S3: (1) **Ecosystems**: Bruxelles should behave as one. (2) **Trust**: is there high-level trust on the local level that it can deliver as needed? Trust is needed because it is the closest level to citizens. (3) **Social**: the current transition is perceived as a threat to jobs; it is needed to give people an alternative, and this can only be done in a high-level and multilevel way.
- **Catherine Wendt (Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission)** summarises indicating that S3 is built from the bottom up, by looking at local challenges. The S3 participatory process to identify needs and opportunities hopefully

helps towards addressing local challenges in a way that is more relevant for the regions. Less innovative regions are facing a more challenging process: it is needed to focus on this point in the future.

She underlined how cooperation truly embodies S3, on two dimensions: (1) between innovation actors (2) between regions, ensuring mutual learning: similar regions are drawn to each other, but complementary regions are brought together as well. She concluded that, while S3 might go through changes in the future, its core values, among which cooperation, are to be maintained through the changes.

Presentation of the latest developments in the S3 Community of Practice

- **Elisabetta Marinelli (S3 CoP Secretariat)** introduced the work of the S3 CoP in the last year. Activities fit into three categories of support, policy advice, and community engagement. For more information on the S3 CoP, please [visit the website](#). The [S3 CoP Observatory](#) was presented to the audience.
- **Els Van de Velde (S3 CoP Secretariat)** presented the work of the [S3 Thematic Platforms and the Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships \(TSSPs\)](#). Regions interested in creating a new Partnership can apply through the [Call for expression of interest](#) for new partnerships: with the next cut-off date on 29 March 2024.

Parallel sessions on experiences and activities related to Smart Specialisation Strategies implementation I

Parallel session 1: S3 and industrial transition

- **Pirkko Taskinen (Director Water Ecosystem & SuperIoT, University of Oulu, Northern Ostrobothnia, Finland)**, presented Oulu region, the “Nordic tech hub”. She outlined the history of ICT in Oulu: “Technopolis” in Oulu was the first technology park in Europe, where SMEs and universities were collaborating together, with support from the city. The first element of success is collaboration. From the times where the ICT sector was centred around Nokia factories, there was a transition, and now the ICT sector is structured around many new companies that are working globally in different vertical directions. Moreover, in the region, some testbeds were created, among which the testbeds for health and water. Pirkko also reflected on the role of the local and national governments in allowing for absorption and diffusion in other sectors. The role of the region and city of Oulu, together with stakeholder support, were the key drivers in this case.

- **Claire Nauwelaers (Independent Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Expert)** presented the DG REGIO pilot action for regions in industrial transition.¹ Regions suffered from common problems, e.g., the dual economy syndrome, a divided society, and path dependency. Lessons on a new frame for industrial transition towards challenge-driven innovation policy include:
 - Industrial transition = societal transformation
 - Challenge-driven S3 priority domains
 - Tackling dual economy/society syndrome
 - Changing role of regional authorities
 - Increasing sense of urgency
- **Luis Goñi Navarro (Regional Strategy Director, Sodena Desarrollo de Navarra, Spain)** highlighted that mature sectors are threatened by transition. Navarra S4 strategy is not only thinking about the direction (which is given by the EC) but is looking at what can be done with local strength to help all EU regions to achieve the goals. Navarra is working on exploiting opportunities related to twin transitions, on the coordination of public instruments, and on the local experimentation processes. Regional strategy needs to align with EU strategy; the goal of Navarra is to reach its final goals, including the beyond GDP measures, and green and digital transition indicators, together with traditional S3 indicators. A goal is to help traditional sectors to transform with the help of digital and green transition. Keywords are coherence, capacity, and commitment.
- **Marek Przeor (Policy Officer, DG GROW, European Commission)** departed from the Industrial Strategy (initially published in March 2020, updated in May 2021) which aims to strengthen the single market resilience. The role of the industrial forum is essential in advising the industrial strategy implementation. The notion of Industrial Ecosystems was incorporated in the strategy, it encompasses the sectors, and all actors that bring value added to the ecosystems. Transition pathways related to each industrial ecosystem include the twin transition and a resilience component. In addition, several other instruments are relevant to the context including EuroClusters, European Cluster Collaboration Platform, Industry Alliances, and Enterprise Europe Network, among others.

Q&A

- In the example of Oulu region, could ICT have been identified as a natural strength for the region by S3?
 - A: ICT was identified thanks to the past experience of collaboration from the times of Nokia prevalence in the region. The collaboration was the starting point to re-develop a strong ICT sector.
- What is the interplay between clusters and interregional collaboration?
 - A: There are many examples from clusters with regions: in the case of North-Rhine Westphalia, key elements of success for the quantum valley were the capacity and capability of human skills; the hydrogen valley was created based on the presence of energy companies. The EU-level task is to bring regions and companies together to be able to compete globally. In Bulgaria, there is a cluster on raw

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/factsheets/2018/pilot-action-regions-in-industrial-transition

materials and rare earth, with 6 billion EUR of revenue. When people work together in Europe, results are evident. The agility of Europe and role of SMEs are the force of the EU.

- How did the Navarra S4 dashboard come to be?
 - A: The dashboard came from the work of a steering committee in 2014, constructed with a quadruple helix approach. “S4” name was chosen to include the fourth “S” for sustainability, encompassing social, environmental, and economic sustainability.

Parallel session 2: Community Building and the Entrepreneurial Discovery Process

- **Cristian Otgon (Head of Smart Specialisation Department, North-West Regional Development Agency, Romania)** presented the S3 and the role of the entrepreneurial discovery process in North-West Romania. The presentation gave an overview of the region, as well as the development of the S3 with support from the JRC and the World Bank as well as the future activities. Three main pillars of the S3 in the region include innovation; health, well-being and the development of emerging sectors; and the regional digital agenda. Future activities include implementing, monitoring, evaluating and updating the S3, however challenges such as stakeholder fatigue and adequate human resources to dedicate remain to be addressed.
- **Elfi Goesaert (R&D Researcher, VITO, Flanders, Belgium)** spoke about regional and interregional collaboration in the healthcare domain including several achievements. Notable activities covered business model development as well as setting up the governance of the legal model to support collaboration. Stakeholder engagement was used and essential from the onset of the project. It remains paramount to have likeminded partners to support interregional collaboration and to have an underlying connection with governments.
- **Rasmus Bergander (Policy Advisor, Central Sweden European Office, Sweden)** presented the entrepreneurial discovery process of Central Sweden, where also the Partnerships for Regional Innovation served as a model for strengthened EDP. The presentation highlighted the importance of a link between EDP and S3, which relies on transformational roadmaps to transition from S3 to implementation with an action plan. Increased stakeholder engagement in the process can support the success. Success factors in the process include having a common starting point and vision, as well as an action focus as opposed to goals. New needs from citizens, civil society, companies (both industry and SMEs) and from the public sector demands and directs transformation towards a more sustainable innovation system.
- **Tomáš Holinka (Head of S3 Strategy Unit, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czechia)**, spoke about the process of enhancing the entrepreneurial discovery process. Increasingly a mission-oriented approach is applied to the development of S3, where a pilot project on ‘Aligning smart specialisation with transformative innovation policy’ was carried out

together with the JRC. This approach allows to concentrate funds from different sources to support research and innovation to tackle the problem.

Q&A

- In practice, can you provide specific practical examples where you established institutional spaces for structured dialogue with the regions?
 - A: In terms of governance, it was important to have the regional ambassador and stakeholders as well as the national body. Regional representatives have the goal to share the interest of the national authority to the regional authority. Overall, they are an important body to include in the activities.
- What is your secret in maintaining the commitment and interest of the stakeholders within your EPD throughout years?
 - A: Language is important to address the right target audience. If you are speaking to a SME, you need to keep in mind that it is different compared to researcher. It is useful to hear their day-to-day struggle and to create a dialogue based on these, listen to their short-term problems and develop an approach to look for innovation. Regions work on regional development, but sometimes they get stuck in an administrative role where it would be beneficial to take more risks.

Parallel session 3: From Local Strengths to Interregional Cooperation

- **Aitor Mintegui (EU Affairs Officer, Basque Country Delegation to the EU, Spain)** presented the case of Basque Country related to interregional collaboration. Today, 11 recognised clusters are active in the main industrial sectors. In 2015 the Basque Country joined the Vanguard Initiative and has been very active in it since, with activities in more than 6 TSSPs today. The main cooperation focus for the Basque Country is to overcome fragmentation, compensate for lack of capacity, benchmark and learn from other regions. It also aims to go from strategic policy towards practical policy combining funding and implementation of projects. Expectations in collaboration need to be managed and the main driver towards successful collaboration is patience. Sharing best practices and experimenting with policy are important and helped the Basque Country becoming more advanced in innovation and research.
- **Pirita Lindholm (Director, ERRIN)** highlighted that S3 is recognised as a relevant tool that requires the will to change and allows room for experimentation. Since its start in 2015, the ecosystem on smart specialisation has become more complex. The RIVs were a welcome addition, but they do require co-funding between Horizon and ERDF which proves challenging. In order to increase flexibility, the local level needs to be able to implement policy and address local challenges, while aligning them with EU missions. S3 can be a tool to get further support and create a framework for collaboration. Innovation projects should bring together academic and private sector, and the public should steer this process.
- **Richard Tuffs (Friends of Smart Specialisation)** highlighted that the main challenge for S3 is the top-down perspective and matching that with the bottom-up nature of EDP. As the global context for regional development evolves, the way in which regional S3 strategies are developed also needs to be adapted. Policy models need to be adapted to place-based

factors in order to function appropriately. More attention needs to be paid to the position of the regions in value chains, both regionally and globally. A more challenge focussed approach to S3 is needed to better communicate S3 strategies and foster stronger collaboration. In addition, more awareness of capacity issues and the cost of coordination is necessary. Stakeholders also need to make better use of the networks and EC support for coordination costs.

- **Marc Pattinson (Senior thematic expert, Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform)** presented Interreg Europe, whose project portfolio provides funding while the Policy Learning Platform provides access to tested policy solutions through various materials, further enabling the exploitation of project results. The six topics of Interreg Europe include smart, green, connected, social, citizen, and governance. Overall, Interreg Europe fosters the acceleration of the policy learning process key to facilitating interregional collaboration in support of S3 design and deployment.

Q&A

- Could you give a more extended reflection on the changes public servants must undergo to accommodate the new S3 scope?
 - A: Going from S3 to S5 might be a bridge too far for some regions, although the societal and environmental aspect will become increasingly important. The next framework should put more emphasis on place-based innovation.
- How can advanced regions benefit from collaboration with weaker regions?
 - A: There is often an issue of capacity in less advanced regions, these capacity issues are present in three areas namely governance, resources and skills. It is however important when engaging into interregional collaboration to also consider elaborating to other regions, and to smartly use the networks and instruments that are available.

Parallel session 4: Experiences monitoring and evaluating S3 performance

- **Tatiana Fernández (Head of Economic Strategy, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain)** discussed several monitoring indicators and expressed the view that traditional indicators to monitor S3 performance are insufficient. EU funds have financed Catalunya's S3 strategy, and, while monitoring, they focused on two things: how to enable AI and data to help the monitoring, as well as understanding how transnational networks in projects work. A new open data platform was launched to identify the blind-spots in their specialisation and their specialisation of their partners. The aim is to use the platform not only for the government, but also for the private sector, allowing them to see what projects already have existing synergies with other projects based on thematic areas, what countries and organisations are often partners of their regions, both at a country level and regional level.
- **Ieva Gurklyte (R&D&I coordinator of ICT Lab division, Lithuania)** introduced Smart Specialisation in Lithuania and local challenges with monitoring and evaluation. She

introduced Lithuania's priorities: health and biotech, manufacturing processes, materials and technology, and ICT. In Lithuania, monitoring indicators are used for the entire economy and S3 priorities. It is important to analyse the S3 performance and the ecosystem at the company level as country-level information does not say much about the challenges companies face. The Innovation Agency is conducting expert surveys and interviews with companies about their experience and specific programmes, to monitor gaps and challenges. In addition, issues with classification and NACE codes were highlighted.

- **Jennifer Maria Grisorio (Head of Research and Education System, ARTI- Puglia, Italy)** started her presentation by sharing difficulties collecting project results by priority areas as a strong link was observed between S3 and regional calls. In 2010, with the first INTERREG project, they started to collect data from applicants and beneficiaries of regional calls to understand the key areas of innovation and the value chains for each priority area. This also allowed the segregation of all indicators based on priority areas. Instruments that are now being used also include components relating to soft innovation, enriching questions, among others. The goal of the monitoring is to provide policymakers with the information needed to develop S3, including external dimensions, enabling the comparison of their own thematic areas with other regions. Next to quantitative data, the questionnaire was recently elaborated with some qualitative questions. One challenge faced related to monitoring is the link between thematic priorities and economic sectors.
- **Alexandra Avdeenko (Evaluation Specialist, Finance, Competitiveness, and Innovation, World Bank)** explained that evaluation is often attached to negative feelings and big implications. For many years, evaluators have been counting the outputs that have been delivered, such as jobs created. However, impact evaluations should be carried out at the project's design stage, very early, not late at the end. Imagine you have a program for better management. How do you improve performance? You need a comparison group against which you will be benchmarking your impact. A good impact evaluation also builds on a good relationship with the managing authorities. An example was given related to the digital transformation of the SMEs, and the regional innovation plan that lies at the heart of it. The World Bank received a request from a regional development agency that aimed to support 400 SMEs to increase their DESI score. They also asked for help in understanding the enterprises' needs and how to evaluate them so that their next call is better adjusted to meet local needs. The digital assessment online tool was created by the World Bank and is now part of the usual application process. Firms often do not know exactly what they need, so the assessment tool created is actually a digital feasibility study. In the end, they had 1300 SMEs that applied for this program, and all of them were deemed eligible. It meant that the random selection of beneficiaries was conducted. These reports/evaluations become super relevant for all applicants regardless of how they were selected - they can be used to apply for other funding opportunities.

Q&A

- Comparing Catalunya to other regions - was that done, and were there striking resemblances or differences?
 - A: Based on H2020 information, the visualisation is just for Catalunya. It would be interested to have more regions with similar platforms, to allow for comparison. It would also be interesting if the European Commission had a platform like this to compare the S3 across the EU.
- What is the difference between R&D 'light' and R&D 'heavy'?
 - A: As a matter of interpretation 'light' can be understood as an ICT software component versus 'heavy' refers to the ICT hardware.
- How can you single out the effect of investment in S3 compared to general investment in the economy? It is hard to separate the effect of S3 on the total economy, especially looking at the impact.
 - A: During this period, when there are many investment funds at various levels, we are focusing on the source of investment and the attention given to priority areas. Some synergies can be useful for innovation value chains, national investment combined with S3 can have an additional effect on the region. The most important thing is to comprehend how the innovation value chains evolve.
 - A: It makes sense to monitor the specialisation and how we invest different funds in the priority areas, but it is very difficult to measure impact.
- All speakers mention that we need a new classification of activities. Economic sectors were created for national accountability, but we are not using them. How can we modernise the current monitoring system?
 - A: Modernising a monitoring system is very difficult. Likewise, adopting a classification based on technology on priority areas might be very difficult. We need to start thinking of different kinds of indicators, and we need to start talking about the indicators and classifications we have now that are not useful. We need to find common indicators and establish the same system on EU level.

Parallel sessions on experiences and activities related to Smart Specialisation Strategies implementation II

Parallel session 5: Driving Innovation Diffusion and Digitalisation Trends

- **Vincenzina Cristofaro (Project Manager, Direzione Generale Università, Ricerca, Innovazione, Lombardy, Italy)** presented the context in which the Lombardy region has developed its S3, namely oriented towards the digital transition and sustainable development. In terms of the digitalisation within the innovation diffusion process in Lombardy, EDP helps to identify applications and uses. The policy mix facilitates and supports digitalisation within innovation diffusion in the region and networks and partnerships are key to promote and share insights to further foster this process. Through

all activities, a bottom-up approach is key, with a close relationship to the underlying clusters. Vincenzina finalised by indicating that data and indicators are important to define where there are gaps in Lombardy and where it should be important to invest.

- **Daniel Všeťečka (Director of Digital Economy and Smart Specialisation department, Ministry of Industry and Trade, Czechia)** presented the national digital agenda activities in Czechia, which were carried out with the support of the JRC and OECD. The Digital agenda outlines horizontal priorities on communication, digitalisation of governmental services, but also the digital capacity among companies as well as vertical priorities including AI and societal resilience. The EDP and its outputs were used to serve the digital economy and society strategy – where S3 has clear links to these strategies. Czechia features several EDIH (four on AI, one on High Performance Computing and one on Cybersecurity). In addition, an AI testing and experimentation facility in manufacturing AI-matters network as well as a digital sandbox is underway. Forthcoming activities underpin also the important of finance, and making the link to provide funding to start-ups, but also enterprise digital transformation through grants.
- **Thomas Wobben (Director of Legislative Works for the COTER, ECON and SEDEC Commissions, Committee of the Regions)** underpinned that innovation diffusion is a driver for productivity. Various indexes are in place, however a new study was launched encompassing a CoR S3 Acceleration Index including indicators on human capital, value added, education, research, SDGs and research, among others. Spyder web diagrams and case studies give a comparison to the European Innovation Scoreboard Summary Innovation Index. While the conclusions are not so clear cut, there are some points that are valuable in terms of measuring innovation diffusion, including the need for new concepts (i.e., Industry 5.0) to strengthen European resilience, as well as need for more policy coherence at all levels of government to foster the directionality of smart specialisation.

Q&A

- Several portals were presented for supporting S3 action, also for data sharing. What is idea behind EDP interaction? Platform?
 - A: There are trends in developing such tools across regions. The tools are often developed specifically to the regional context, and not funded 100% through ERDF, but by other means. Transferability is limited, but insights on how to develop them can be shared in some contexts.
- Innovation support and innovation services are important for companies. Can you give examples from MS how they are dealing with such services?
 - A: Innovation diffusion is a major implementation challenge related to innovation and innovation support services. innovation takes place in stages, ranging from different TRL levels, basic, applied, scale up, etc. For each stage, where there is a market failure, one can provide public assistance. For universities, it is more about entrepreneurial spirit, later stages are more about financial gaps.

Parallel session 6: Improving Regional Research and Innovation Systems

- **Alasdair Reid (Policy director, EFIS Centre, S3 CoP Secretariat)** showcased regions' progress in improving R&I systems on a map, where a positive trend emerges. Emerging innovator regions are falling behind the EU average, signalling a pressing need to bridge this gap. Although improvements are evident, significant performance gaps persist. Adopting a "donut principle" approach, the focus should be on channelling innovation and research efforts toward these critical objectives. It is needed to provide more directionality: the sustainability agenda can broaden the scope of S3. The implication for policy design is the need to foster diversity in discussions. This entails involving individuals from various industries, and services, not limiting participation to industry only.
- **Kaitlyn Kovacs (Senior Consultant, Innomine, Hungary)** interventions focused on how Hungary is strengthening its innovation and research ecosystem. Hungary is a moderate innovator country, has a national economic priority and horizontal priorities. The innovation hub is focusing on the innovation of manufacturing; the automotive and ICT sectors are dominating and have high potential to develop their technologies. Hungary is organised in 20 counties, has a national S3 but no specific regional strategy, and regions have specific goals in developing their economy. The territorial innovation platform was established in 2020, and universities and institutions take a dominating role in the regional development. The economic performance of Hungary is dominated by multinational companies and SMEs. A focus should be put on the development of SMEs, since they have a key role in employment and digitalisation. SMEs are not using the innovation developed by research centres and universities so it would be ideal to create cooperation between actors.
- **Eva Damm (Policy Officer Research and Science, Culture and Tourism, Free State of Saxony, Germany)** presented the structure of the innovation landscape in Saxony and how it is planned to tackle challenges in the region. The goal is to achieve framework conditions that can strengthen Saxony's position as a research location. Notably takeaways include that it is important to communicate with the civil society the impact of research on the daily life of everyone. In addition, it is desirable to put into place an innovative format to involve all stakeholders, create a platform to truly use the synergies, looking positively to the galaxy of science in the future, and be prepared for the future challenges to come.
- **Magdalena Cymerys (Policy Officer, DG RTD, European Commission)** presented the New European Innovation Agenda, as a transversal topic. Magdalena underlined that deep tech includes deep societal problems. The next step is to work together with other European instruments, such as I3 and EIE. In addition, the Interconnected innovation ecosystems Horizon-EIE 2023/2024 was presented. The Regional Innovation Valleys matchmaking map was presented: <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/strategy/support-policy-making/shaping-eu-research-and-innovation-policy/new-european-innovation-agenda/new-european-innovation-agenda-roadmap/regional-innovation-valleys-matchmaking-map>

Q&A

- Is there stakeholder involvement in the Innovation platform?
 - A: Yes, the S3 involves the quadruple helix actors, but collaboration between industry and academic sector is low.
- Are there negative or positive effect of not having a regional S3?
 - A: It is not per se necessary to have S3 at regional level, especially if other plans take place at national level and regional problems, challenges and themes are dealt with under the national development plans.
- How research – enterprise collaboration is measured?
 - A: This is currently not measured in Hungary, it could be measured in the future with indicators from the university and from enterprises. However, multinational enterprises often use innovation developed elsewhere, so it could be a challenge to measure this.
- Where did the idea for white paper come from?
 - A: The idea was to have the time to think together and to have a more flexible document, not a strategy but a document that could leave space for imagination and decision making.
- Will there be a next call for the Innovation valley?
 - A: It will depend on the results of the pilot, a decision will be taken in which form to continue the programme.
- Could there be an incentive for strong innovators to include emerging innovators?
 - A: Regions working together are stronger, this is already an incentive. Moreover, talent and structures are needed to use the funding that are obtained, a strong innovator cannot deliver alone since its regional / national market is not big enough.
- Which role do you expect for clusters in the new EIE?
 - A: It depends on the regional situation, there is no example available yet, but clusters are welcome.
- What would you recommend involving transdisciplinary?
 - A: Partnerships with university are being developed, so that they can be more involved.
 - A: It is needed to inform about services, to support actors with regional funds to write good proposal, and to communicate success stories

Parallel session 7: S3 Governance: Evolving Structures and Challenges

- **Karolina Lipinska (Deputy Director, Department for Economic Development, Office of the Marshal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship, Pomorskie, Poland)** presented a reaction on how to create effective instruments to support technology potentials in EU regions, arising also from experiences in the S3 CoP Expert Group. Lessons learnt are connected with political commitment, significance of regional autonomy, multilevel governance, institutional capacity, the entrepreneurial discovery process and the role of ERDF. Bottlenecks of innovation policy management include limited impact of local and regional authorities to improve innovativeness, weakening political mandate, as well as demotivation of regional partners to engage in and co-create innovation policy, and the nature of the innovation process as acting in parallel to real market processes. Both

regional and national smart specialisation is needed to reach full potential and to fulfil the enabling condition.

- **Valeria Bandini (Head of Europe and International Area of ART-ER, Emilia Romagna, Italy)** presented the S3 Governance in Emilia Romagna, where governance operates at four levels including political and strategic level, technical level, implementation level and participatory level. Key tools in the process include an S3 Committee, the S3 Forum, The Emilia Romagna Open Innovation Platform and ART-ER.
- **Sander Van der Molen's (Partner Innovation & Funding, Civitta)** presentation focussed on creating interregional corridors and how to do so. The first pillar is on training, coaching and peer learning, where widening regions have unique challenges and opportunities. The next pillar is on governance, where S3 in widening regions has unique challenges, although it remains clear that regions can benefit from interregional collaboration. Building corridors takes time, efforts, skills, and sustained efforts. A dedicated governance of corridors is needed.
- **Florence Hennart (Senior advisor in the Economic Policy Directorate at the Walloon administration for Economy, Employment and Research, Wallonia, Belgium)** spoke on behalf of the region of Wallonia. The main challenges faced by the region in terms of governance of S3 relate to (i) the creation of impact, link to the markets, knowledge valorisation, (ii) broadening innovation dynamics, (iii) strengthening link to EU policies, programmes, networks and (iv) overall effectiveness of the policy mix. The way forward relies on enhanced governance optimisation of the policy mix, together with a focus on societal challenges and market needs to pave the way for new priorities and governance. As such EDP remains important as a process. If you want to push innovation in regional ecosystems it is also important to keep in mind the governance of it, which could ideally include a dedicate S3 team, cluster organisations, and a R&I administration to develop joint strategic innovation initiatives.

Q&A

- How do we capitalise on the power of informality? What mechanisms could be used to maximise what is not possible to institutionalise? Can clusters contribute to corridors?
 - A: They can be catalysts and initiators. It must be within a political and strategic framework of public authorities and ecosystems.
- Are your regional politicians familiar, interested and supporting the S3? How do you organise this dialogue? What obstacles have you met and overcome?
 - A: There is an issue of silo breaking in certain regions. Certain overarching policy tools or umbrella initiatives can help to overcome silos by collaborating jointly under this umbrella.
- To what extent are the challenges of governance different across regions in Europe? Are companies interested in participation in S3 processes?
 - A: There is still a question of companies and their interest. Companies need new tools to pick up interest, otherwise there will be no change. Companies often ask, what's in it for me when these tools are organised. Strategy should be carefully considered in this approach.

Parallel session 8: Fostering interregional collaboration through S3 Thematic Platforms and Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (TSSPs)

- **Ramunas Linartas (Policy officer, Smart and Sustainable Growth Unit, DG REGIO, European Commission)** presents the I3 instrument, highlighting that I3 focusses on interregional collaboration through capacity building, supporting partnerships and facilitating the creation of consortia. The capacity building aspect is supported in helping public authorities and intermediaries guide companies towards interregional investment portfolios and addressing challenges in innovation building faced in less developed regions. I3 also focusses on dissemination and exploitation by making them requirements to receive the funding.
- **Wim De Kinderen (Programme Director European Affairs, Brainport Eindhoven EU Office, Netherlands)** highlighted that TSSPs should ideally be demonstration projects with no research involved, indicate an industrial commitment, have a European dimension and show the expected impact on economy, society and the environment. The projects should also build on new industrial value chains. TSSPs have the potential to save time and money, however they can be complex and numerous to manage. These platforms should align investments and facilitate European value chains.
- **Rene Wijlens (Executive director, Cluster Sports & Technology/EPsi, Eindhoven, Netherlands)** represents ClusSport, which covers 14 regions represented by regional authorities and quadruple helix innovation clusters to create a community of excellence. It integrates an innovation cycle in order to motivate, identify opportunities and act upon them. The goals of the partnership are based on regional excellence and ambitions. Projects help to create momentum and allow to work together in a bottom-up approach. The main success factors are to gather sufficient resources for platform actions and balancing between frontrunners and followers.
- **Marisa Fernandez (Cluster Manager ZINNAE, Spain)** represents the Water Smart Territories TSSP, which consists of 25 regions and focusses on circular economy, resilient infrastructure, digitisation and governance. The main interests of the involved partners are to build projects and share best practices. The WG on Internationalisation works very well and meeting regularly to discuss and share news related to internationalisation. Needs that are not fulfilled on their platform include the sharing of experiences and strategic interests. A challenge is still to find a better way to involve regional authorities.

Q&A

- How far did Interreg support increase capacity to move up the EU funding value chain?
 - A: Partnerships need a structure to support them in realising benefits from interregional collaboration projects. Developing a strategy is key, and this strategy should be independent from projects; the Interreg project supported part of the implementation of their strategy.
- How much time does the coordination take per month? What are the estimated costs of coordination?

- A: It takes time and effort to engage in interregional collaboration. It is really beneficial to have a dedicated person, like a network manager, that can devote part of his time to the animation of the partnership.

Afternoon plenary

Outcomes from the parallel sessions

- **Yari Borbon** (session 1) summarised the presentations of the first parallel session, which included the story of the region of Oulu, with a strong ICT tradition, and the subsequent evolution and transition of the region, which allowed it to have strong ICT and technical skills and to overcome the period of crisis. Navarra rebranded its S3 strategies, putting SDGs at the core of the strategy, and working on favourable taxation programmes. These mechanisms allowed Navarra to be one of the top innovative regions in Spain.
- **Lena Tsipouri** (session 2) summarised the outcome of four presentations of diverse EU regions, from a geography and maturity point of view. Romania is a less developed region, which has done its S3 for the first time with the EDP. In the case of Flanders, a specific project was presented, with a specific quadruple helix approach. Other presentations focused on the creation of collaboration opportunities in Sweden and on how the national authority can help regional processes in Czechia. Four main key takeaway messages were presented:
 - A long experience with S3 development emerged, putting EDP at the centre: across regions, the opportunities, the challenges, and the level of concentration vary. Despite the challenges, it emerged that it is worth investing in the EDP, when it works, it is rewarding.
 - The engagement of the business sector is challenging, it may be reluctant to invest time and resources, but it collaborates and plays a role when it is convinced that exercise is benefitting the business sector.
 - Quadruple helix: the question is on which stakeholders are actively contributing. Some are more active than others, and can convince the less convinced ones.
 - Ambitions: many regions can raise their ambition in the EDP, new tools were tested in the regions and have proved useful.
- **Els Van de Velde** (session 3) summarised key takeaways from the session on interregional collaboration. S3 was originally foreseen as an interregional open strategy. The session focused on the outward dimension, how to position the region: S3 allows to speak a common language, it provides the main words and terminology to make sure it is understood. Capacity is a key issue in three areas namely governance, resources, and skills. The challenge is to make authorities understand the issue of capacity and translate what it implies for the regions. Els concluded with an invitation for regions to be smart and to reach out to other TSSPs, and to use the networks and instruments created by the EC.
- **Daniela Kretz** (session 4) summarised the monitoring and evaluation session, which had presentations from Catalunya, Lithuania, Puglia and a novel approach by the World Bank. The main takeaways were:
 - Know your impact: It is needed to understand what the impact is and what success looks like, and only afterwards can the information be identified.

- Filter: Do not focus on available information, but relevant information to answer the question at hand
 - Look beyond: She underlined the importance of new indicators to achieve this aim, e.g., AI and new data tools. New indicators can give new answers and points of view.
 - Be flexible: Finally, it is needed to be flexible in approaches, and adapt to specific contexts, to learn from different M&E practices.
- **Susana Elena Perez** (session 5) presented insights from the innovation and digitalisation trends. Innovation diffusion can be a key driver for productivity, new tools as AI can be further explored. She underlined how the innovation agenda and new regulation are key factors in innovation. She highlighted the need for coherence at the level of governance and reported the example of the CoR acceleration index. https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/studies/Documents/The%20Future%20of%20Regional%20Smart%20Specialisation%20Strategies%20-%20Sustainable,%20Inclusive%20and%20Resilient/SEDEC_Smart%20Specialisation.pdf
 - **Alasdair Reid** (session 6) reported the key highlights from the session on improving regional R&I system. He remarked that the innovation divide/innovation paradox is still relevant today. A need emerges for increased directionality and it is needed to focus on challenges to better tackle them. A discussion focused on the role of the innovation platform in Hungary in the mobilisation of the public sector, notably the universities. The question was on how to get universities to work better with enterprises and collaborate better with other actors. A focus was also put on how to communicate that research has an impact on society.
 - **Sander van der Molen** (session 7) summarised this session, remarking that differences between regions still exist. Moreover, S3 does not happen in the void, the challenge is to align it to other EU programs and priorities. Key recommendations include to engage and avoid stakeholders' fatigue, and not look for unicorns, but to consider a wider definition of innovation. Concerning the need to break the silos, a suggestion that came from the discussion is to promote more informal networks, bringing different stakeholders, and encouraging civil society involvement. It is possible to start at a strategy level and involve the government after the strategy is set.
 - **Els Van de Velde** (session 8) reported on the session on TSSPs. This session aimed to identify opportunities and benefits related to interregional collaboration. It emerged that sharing the enthusiasm and creating trust in TSSPs is key in moving forward. Moreover, it was stated that interregional collaboration takes time, patience is necessary, and long-term efforts are needed. It was stressed that several solutions are available to get funding for interregional collaboration, and while it is challenging to pursue them, it can also be rewarding.

Conclusions and takeaways for practitioners and closing

The panel discussion aimed to close the session with clear takeaways for practitioners. In doing so, the following elements were discussed:

- **Teresa Riesgo (General Secretary for Innovation of the Spanish Government)** reminded the audience about the Spanish role in S3. S3 has evolved, and lessons were learned on how to design, implement, and evaluate the strategy. This event has been an occasion to discuss these elements, and how to involve stakeholders.

In Spain, 17 regions have developed their S3, which is a strategic approach and a pathway for new development. In the case of Catalunya, she highlighted the transformative innovation approach based on systemic innovation and shared agenda, and underlined how a participatory model can find avenues for territorial development and common goods, paving the way for new innovation approaches (e.g. regional innovation valleys).

The new EU innovation agenda has a flagship on regional differences. This topic will also be important in the Spanish conclusion in the Council of the EU union under the Spanish presidency.

She concluded by underlying the importance of Europe in interregional cooperation and exchange of best practices. In Spain, the idea has already been put into place with complementary plans and a network for Technology Centers (RTO), as an interregional collaboration instrument.

- **Tatiana Fernandez (Head of Economic Strategy, Generalitat de Catalunya, Spain)** took the occasion to thank the audience, the speakers, the team from the S3 CoP, the national authority, and the European Commission. She recognised that the conference has been an opportunity to exchange knowledge, good practices, and challenges, with practitioners around Europe. She concluded by reminding the audience of the 29th November schedule.

Closing remarks

- **Catherine Wendt (Head of Unit for Smart and Sustainable Growth, DG REGIO, European Commission)** concluded by recalling that S3 is the key area of support for cohesion policy, S3 CoP – the venue to share experiences and best practices. Commonalities and complementarity can be exploited with the S3CoP. She concluded by thanking everybody involved, the host Generalitat Catalunya, the S3CoP secretariat, the EC colleagues, and the DG REGIO team, and finally thanked the speakers and participants for sharing their time and experience, and for the fruitful and lively discussions.