



S3 CoP Working Group: Interregional Collaboration

Input Note 1: The challenge of capacity for interregional collaboration

Authors: Claire Nauwelaers, Richard Tuffs, Federico Bley and Vincent Duchêne

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1. Introduction and status of WG's activities

Objectives and modus operandi of the S3 CoP Working Group on Interregional Collaboration

The Working Groups developed within the S3 Community of Practice (S3 CoP) aim to create a learning loop for S3 stakeholders on the fulfilment of the S3 enabling condition focusing on industrial transition, innovation diffusion and interregional collaboration. Interregional collaboration is one of the seven fulfilment criteria underlying the good governance of national or regional smart specialisation strategies (so called enabling condition). Interregional collaboration means that, building on the priorities set out in each S3, regions should seek opportunities for international collaboration between research actors, innovation actors, private companies and citizen/civil society, in similar areas based on the mapping of complementarities. Measures should be put in place and promoted to engage regional stakeholders (universities and RTOs, companies, clusters and civil society) in participating in and developing international value chains, innovation-driven collaboration networks, etc. As a result, S3 in the period 2021-2027 should have a more explicit “outward-looking dimension” than was the case under the 2014-2020 period.

In this context, the main purpose of the S3 CoP Working Group on International Collaboration is:

- 1) to collect and document existing knowledge and good practices;
- 2) to identify common needs, problems and challenges;
- 3) to co-develop with the regions potential solutions (new approaches, policies, instruments, and coordination mechanisms); and
- 4) to support and monitor the deployment of solutions and adapt them to regional specificities.

The main target audience for the activities and output of all the WGs are regional (and where appropriate national) authorities. The WGs will operate over a period of three years, from 2023 to 2025. They are supported by a WG Leader, a Chair and a Rapporteur (who form a ‘coordinating team’).

The 13 members of the S3 CoP WG “Interregional Collaboration” have been selected based on their concrete experience with interregional collaboration, but also reflecting a diversity in their backgrounds and their regions' profiles. The activities of the WG are conducted according to a bottom-up, iterative and a challenge-focused peer learning approach to facilitate exchanges of experience, challenges and possible solutions among regional stakeholders. The outputs and proposed solutions will be examined and tested with a broader group of regional practitioners in dedicated webinars aimed at informing, discussing and refining the outputs of the WG towards a wider community of regions.

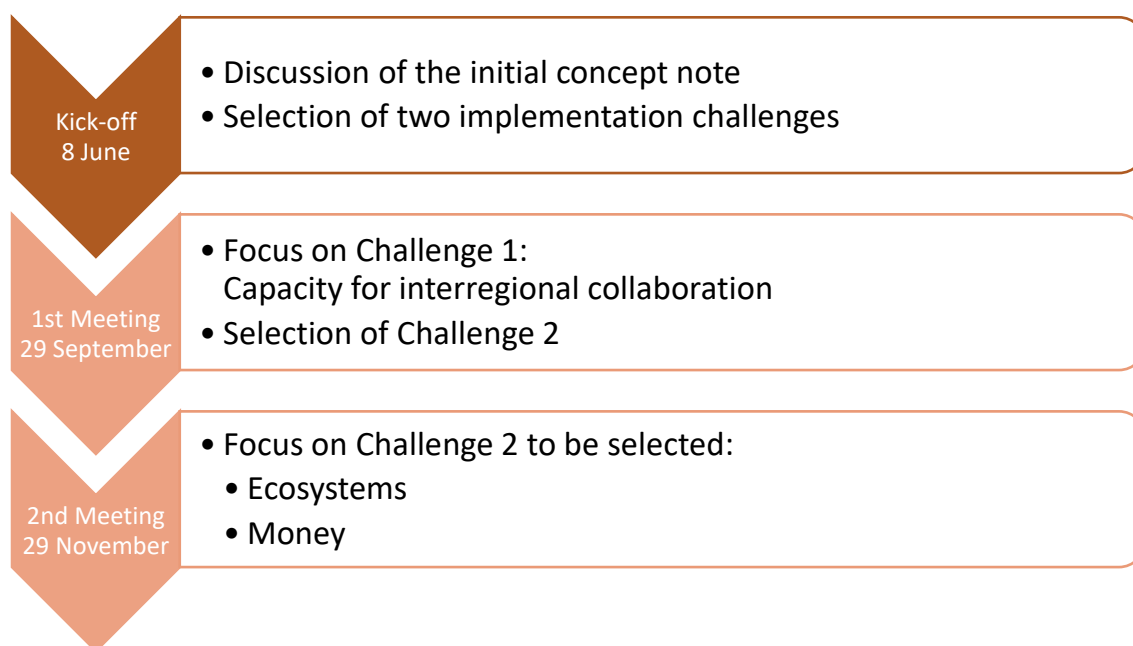
The S3 CoP WG “Interregional Collaboration” operates in close relationship with “Thematic S3 Platforms and Partnerships”. The WG designs its activities based on the analysis of interregional partnerships, corresponding to different needs and challenges amongst them. This WG will function as ‘test-bed’ for Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships (and any other relevant form of interregional partnership) by exploring and co-developing new solutions or approaches to support the development of interregional collaboration. The WG liaises with activities, needs and challenges of ongoing interregional partnerships (e.g. links to WP7 for the management of TSSPs, links to WP6 for support to S3 in the regions etc.).

Status of WG activities in 2023

An extensive concept note has been distributed to the members of the WG as a basis for the initial discussion at its (virtual) kick-off meeting on 8th June 2023, as well as a questionnaire to members (Annex A1). The aim of the kick-off meeting was to agree on the general directions of activities and to identify the main challenges with which WG members are confronted when engaging and implementing interregional collaboration around their S3s. The outcomes of that meeting are summarised in **Section 2** of this input note.

The first (virtual) WG meeting on September 29th 2023 will focus on capacity for interregional collaboration. A questionnaire on how to address this challenge has been circulated in advance of the meeting (Annex A2). Its results are summarised in **Section 3** of this input note.

During the first meeting in September, a decision will be taken on the refinement of the second subject for the second WG meeting to take place (live) on November 29th 2023, based on the second-ranked topics of ‘Ecosystems’ and ‘Money’ as next most popular priorities.



2. Identified Challenges for Interregional Collaboration

Key messages from on-line kick-off meeting (8th June 2023)

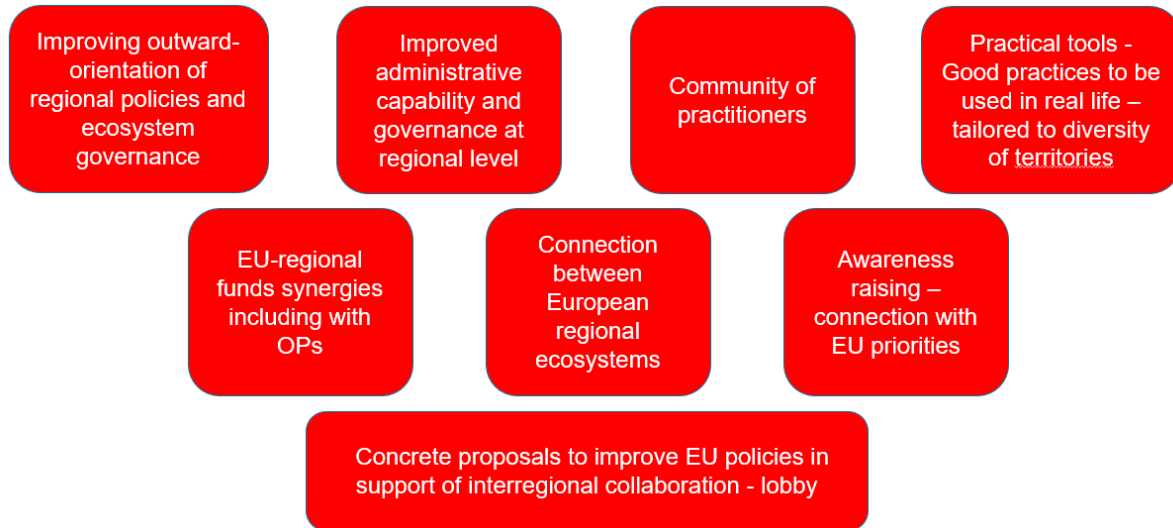
Following a round table of introductions, the WG's objective, methodology, timeline of activities, role of participants and the concept note were presented by the WG Leader. The core of the meeting consisted of a discussion, moderated by the Chair, of the challenges and priorities for inter-regional collaboration by all participants. The discussion was framed on the concept note circulated before the meeting, as well as on the participants' own prior suggestions, submitted in a questionnaire (Annex A1) and summarised at the meeting.

Key points made by participants were summarised by the Rapporteur as follows:

- Regional governments are facing 'lights' as well as 'shadows' in their experiences with implementing interregional collaboration.
- Interregional collaboration is a new area of work in several regions and is hampered by a too inward-looking attitude. Changing mindsets is a necessity to move forward.
- Aligning regional and EU policies is complex and leads to difficulties in designing interregional collaboration.
- The case of Interreg was pointed out as a good opportunity for relatively easy-to-access support – in particular the cross-border programmes – leading to positive experiences. However, it was also noted that Interreg might be seen as a source for 'survival' for domestic organisations, and also that there is a risk of generating many 'stand-alone projects' lacking synergies and leverage effects towards sustainable collaboration.
- Success depends on the will to go beyond borders right from the beginning of the strategic planning stage. It is important to first define a strategy and then develop action plans to ensure that money will follow rather than the reverse.
- Regional authorities find it difficult to follow and support the many interregional initiatives and developments that are ongoing in their region. This capacity issue might be addressed by the use of intermediaries such as clusters.
- Not many regions (within the respondents) have engaged in interregional specialisation strategies involving exchange and collaboration beyond their own borders.
- Interregional collaboration efforts often depend on the work of a few key people, whose knowledge is not often effectively relayed to other colleagues in their region.
- Interregional partnerships differ according to levels of maturity and so the challenges they face vary accordingly.
- There is a need for better joint understanding and, given the interregional nature of the activity, a better and mutual understanding of concepts and terminology across territories engaged in interregional collaboration.

Through the questionnaire, the participants clarified their expectations from the WG, as indicated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Expectations by the WG members prior to the Kick-off meeting

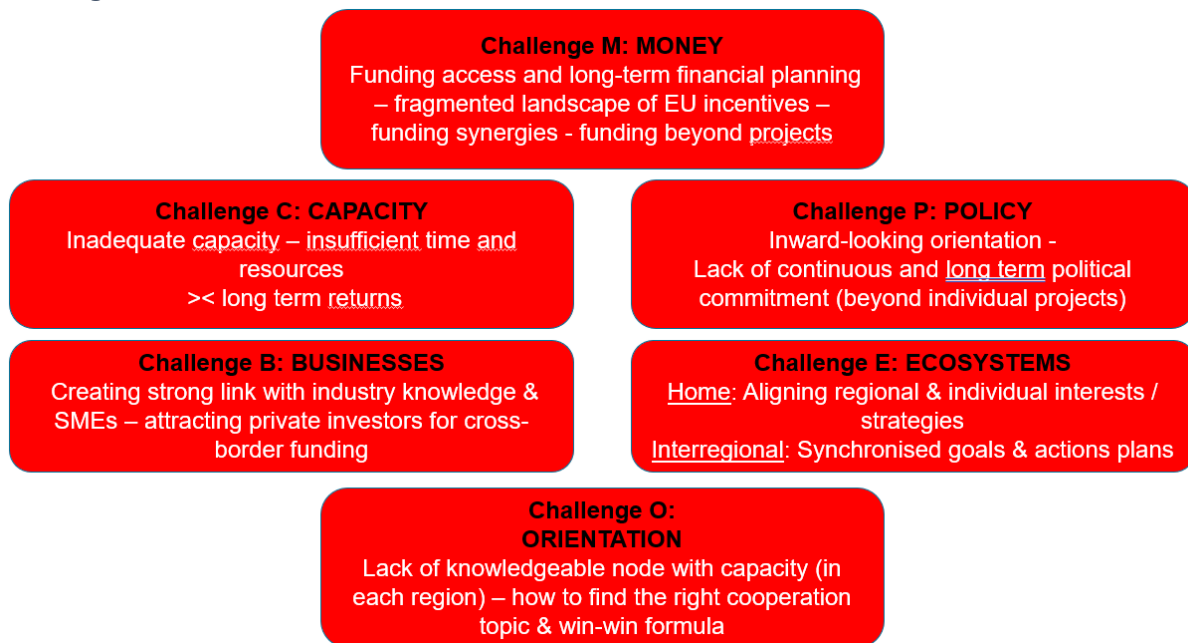


Source: Coordinating team based on WG members’ input through questionnaire A1

Prioritisation of implementation challenges

All WG participants had provided responses to the questionnaire circulated prior to the kick-off meeting. The challenges identified by participants were analysed, clustered and summarised as follows by the coordinating team. The process highlighted the six most popular broad challenges (Figure 2). These six broad challenges were presented and discussed in view of selecting the two most pressing challenges as priority themes for the WG.

Figure 2 Implementation challenges identified by the WG members prior to the Kick-off meeting

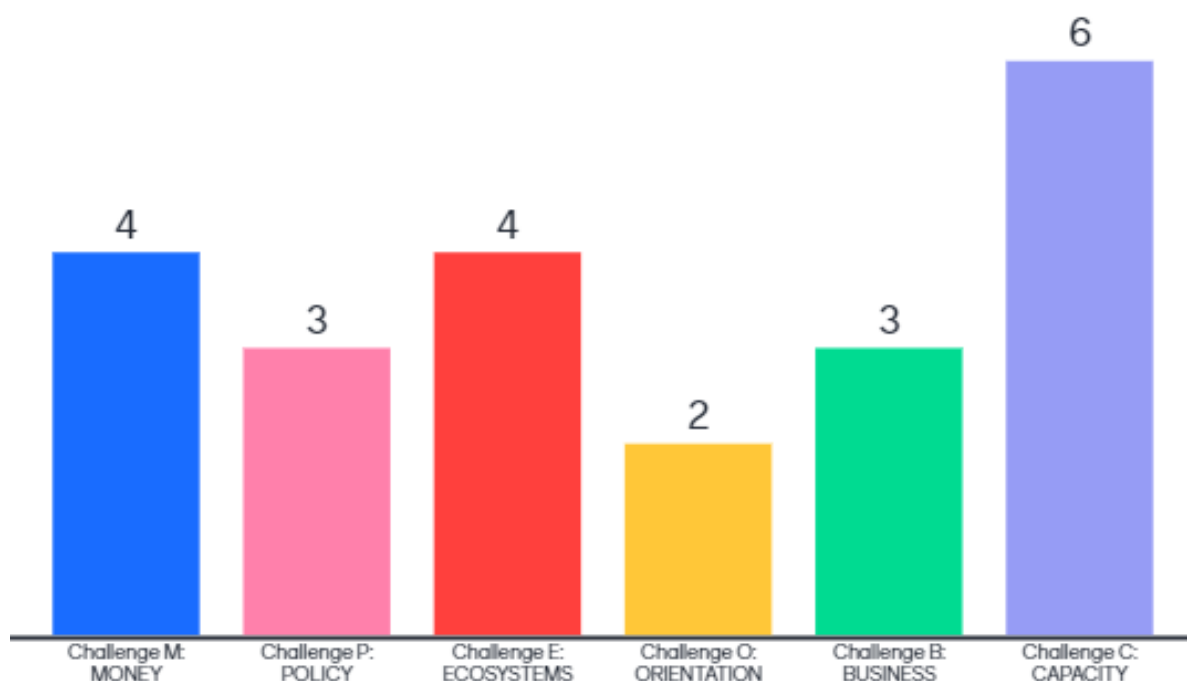


Source: Coordinating team based on WG members’ input through questionnaire A1

During the meeting, participants were invited to vote on challenges they believed were most relevant¹. The results of the voting are shown below (Figure 3) and indicate that **the building of capacity for interregional collaboration was seen as the most important challenge**. Nevertheless, all challenges received some votes, indicating that all are seen as important. While accepted as being relevant, participants found the ‘ecosystems’ challenge too broadly defined to become a workable focus for the WG.

¹ Each participant could select two challenges, hence the total number of points equals the double of the number of voting participants. Only WG members were allowed to vote.

Figure 3 Prioritisation of implementation challenges by WG members during the kick-off meeting on 8th June 2023



Source: Meeting participants voting on Mentimeter during the kick-off meeting on 8th June 2023

3. Unpacking the main Capacity Challenges

The group selected **the ‘Capacity’ challenge as a priority challenge for the first meeting of the WG**, planned for 29th September 2023. This issue is seen as a precondition both to engage in interregional collaboration, and to sustain it. However, during the kick-off meeting it was also noted that this challenge is both complex and multifaceted and still too broadly defined at this stage.

- There is a need for better joint understanding and, given the interregional nature of the activity, a better and mutual understanding of concepts and terminology across territories engaged in interregional collaboration.

As noted in the expectations of the WG (see page 5 above) to provide a better and mutual understanding of concepts and terminology and to generate tangible outputs, it was decided to first ‘unpack’ the challenge of ‘capacity’ into more concrete sub-dimensions. The coordinating team prepared a second questionnaire for WG members (sent on 19th June 2023 – see Annex A2) which including proposals to clarify the sub-dimensions of the broad ‘capacity’ issue. WG members were asked to confirm or amend this list, indicate priorities and propose presentations on these themes in the first WG meeting on 29th September.

The WG members’ reactions on the long list of sub-challenges is summarised in Figure 4. In the first column, the sub-challenges initially proposed by the coordinating team are ranked according to priorities stated by the group, with the most popular topics at the top of the table. **Two sub-challenges were identified as priority topics: “engaging stakeholders” and “institutional engagement”**. These provide the structure for the first meeting on 29th September, which consists of two sessions, one for each theme.

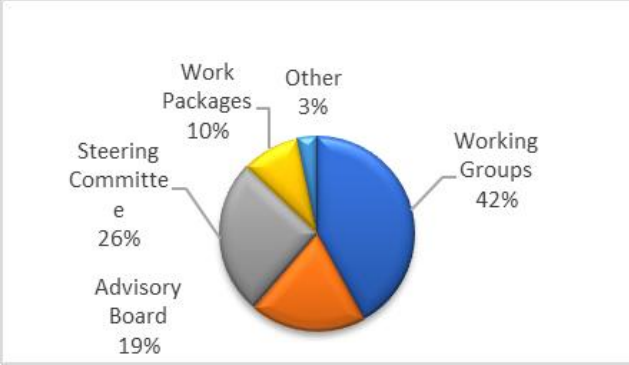
The second column of Figure 3 provides ideas from the WG members and the coordinating team on relevant questions to discuss during the first meeting. In doing so, some elements of the sub-challenges placed below in the table are noted as relevant for the prioritised issues.

Figure 4 Capacity sub-challenges as prioritised by WG members as a basis for its first meeting on 29th September 2023

Proposed Capacity sub-challenges ²	Possible discussion points
<p>From a one person game to institutional engagement</p> <p>In the kick-off meeting, it was noted that many regional offices in Brussels are relatively small yet contain a lot of information on interregional collaboration activities and more importantly access to networks and knowledge. There was a concern that much of this knowledge is not codified or transferred and often remains in the head of one person. The loss of this person can mean a significant loss of learning, knowledge and relevant contacts.</p> <p>So, how do we move from a ‘one-person game’ to a more institutional/sustainable format in a region? What regional governance structures are most effective?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to best justify the value-added (outcomes) of inter-regional collaboration to regional decision-makers? How to make sure it is not merely an ‘add-on topic’? How to overcome natural inward-looking tendencies? • How to ensure political engagement for inter-regional collaboration? How to obtain strong and political mandate for inter-regional collaboration? • How to achieve the mainstreaming of interregional collaboration in the policy agenda and regional funding programmes? • What requirements may be needed for individuals tasked with inter-regional collaboration, to ensure their efforts do not remain individual efforts but are effectively communicated and acted upon? How to modify the ‘one-person’ game into a ‘coordinator’ game? • What role(s) should project owners play, what are the benefits and the limits of their action? • How to achieve coordinated engagement between regional actors, instead of solo-games? How to move towards better aligned agendas? • What could be the role of the S3 management to lead and mobilize regional stakeholders? What skills are available or need to be developed to achieve this aim? Who would be the key recipients?

² The sub-challenges have been re-ordered according to ranking provided by WG members, by decreasing order of preference.

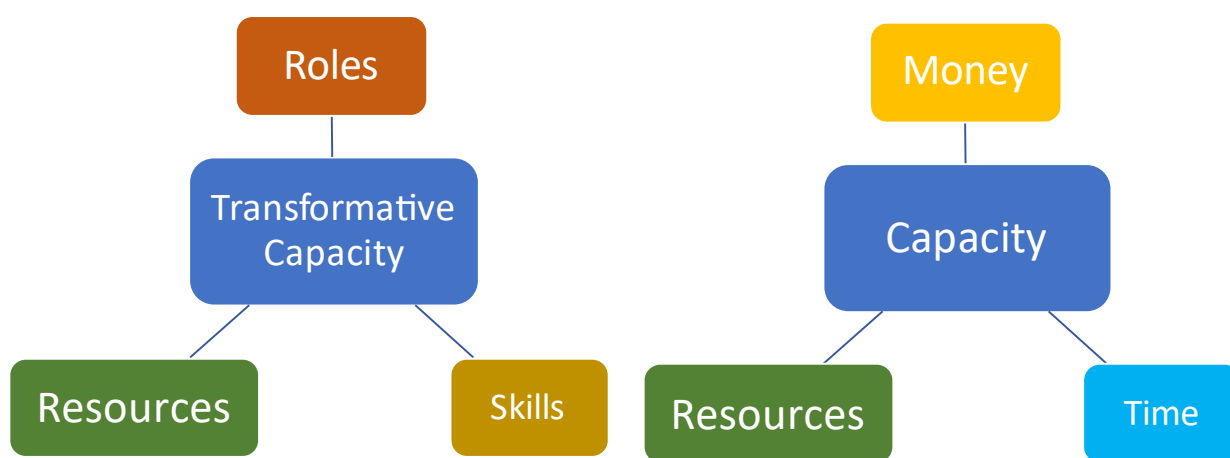
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How to move from individual projects towards impactful inter-regional collaboration? How to ensure scaling up and sustainability of such collaborations? • How to improve administrative capacity to manage resources and operations in an interregional setting? • Are existing regional governance structures fit for purpose or do they need to be modified to incorporate the inter-regional collaboration dimension? • How to reinforce the capacities and willingness of structural funds' managing authorities to facilitate the implementation of interregional partnerships? • Can institutionalized governance structures inhibit the capacity to develop bottom-up projects?
<p>Engaging stakeholders</p> <p>How to strengthen the engagement of regional stakeholders? How to ensure commitment once "saturation point" is reached?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who could be the 'change agents' or 'champions' fostering wide engagement? • Whom to engage? How to prioritise between (types of) stakeholders? • How to best 'sell' the need to engage to individual stakeholders? What kind of customized information helps to clarify benefits? How to collect, prepare, and communicate the relevant information? What are the concrete opportunities that increase the interest of stakeholders? What are the convincing arguments on return for time invested? What role does 'attracting new money' play here? • What needs to be done to change inward-oriented mindsets of stakeholders? To incorporate inter-regional collaboration into their core vision and mission? • What can be done to engage vulnerable and "hard-to-reach" groups? • How to best engage thematic experts (focused on regional topics) in EU collaborations? How can they best communicate their expertise? • Do the engagement processes evolve between initial (starting) versus further (deepening, sustaining) stages of inter-regional collaboration?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What balance of efforts between developing regional strategy and engaging stakeholders? • What appropriate engagement methods? See contribution from ECRN below  <table border="1"> <caption>Engagement Methods Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Method</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Working Groups</td> <td>42%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Steering Committee</td> <td>26%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Advisory Board</td> <td>19%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Work Packages</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>3%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Method	Percentage	Working Groups	42%	Steering Committee	26%	Advisory Board	19%	Work Packages	10%	Other	3%
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<p>Peer learning – how to improve the processes? How to establish training on inter-cultural communication between regions? How to achieve common understanding of concepts and words?</p>													
<p>What inter-regional governance structures are most effective? How to establish a strong and committed partnership? How to ensure shared understanding of: scope, goals, roles and responsibilities of each actor?</p>													
<p>How to measure return on investment? How to better communicate the benefits of interregional collaboration? Are ‘quick wins’ part of the answer and how?</p>	<p>Note: this is relevant to support both “stakeholders” and “institutional engagement”</p>												
<p>How do we better involve regional agencies or intermediaries in interregional collaboration?</p>	<p>Note: this is relevant to the questions under “stakeholders engagement”</p>												
<p>How to overcome the peripherality challenge ? How to involve less experienced regions?</p>	<p>This is a concern for peripheral regions and requires both a specific analysis and positive case studies.</p>												
<p>At what scale – level of granularity - should we look for interregional collaboration e.g. cross border joint S3s, programmes, action lines, projects? How to maintain a ‘fil rouge’ (key themes) in partnerships?</p>													

Source: Coordinating team based on WG members’ input through questionnaire A2

Finally, Figure 5 proposes two conceptualisations of the capacity issue, each around a triangle: the first one (left graphic) comes from a growing academic interest in transformative capacity³ and a second one (right graphic) from a member of the WG, the latter suggesting that “with three factors you will surely succeed, with two factors you can somewhat accomplish your goal, but with one factor only you are doomed”. This can be used to structure the discussions and dig deeper into the operational conditions for effective capacity for inter-regional collaboration.

Figure 5 Two triangle concepts for Capacity



[Borras, S. et. al. \(2023\) EconPapers: The Transformative Capacity of Public Sector Organisations in Sustainability Transitions: A Conceptualization \(repec.org\).](#)

[Written contribution from WG member Harri Kuusela](#)

4. Conclusions & Next Steps

The first (virtual) WG meeting will be held on 29 September 2023 and will consist of four distinctive – but interrelated- blocks:

1. Welcome, introduction to the objectives of the meeting and review of the process; the presentation of this input note with a summary of the June kick-off meeting and subsequent actions taken over the summer;
2. Discussion on the way to better engage stakeholders (first ‘capacity sub-challenge’), to create operational capacity for interregional collaboration. Presentations will be given by representatives of Wallonia, Normandy and ECRN⁴. The speaker from

³ Borras, S. et al. (2023). The Transformative Capacity of Public Sector Organizations in Sustainability Transitions: A Conceptualization, Centre for Innovation Studies, University of Lund, *Papers in Innovation Studies* no. 2023/02.

⁴ All members of the WG were invited to offer to give presentations at the 29th September meeting. Two members (Wallonia and ECRN) took up this offer.

Normandy is external to this working group and has been invited given her involvement in ERRIN and as coordinator of the “H2 Valleys TSSP”.

3. Discussion on how to move from a one person game to institutional engagement, as driver and guarantee for continued and sustained interregional collaboration. Presentations will be given by representatives of Aragon and Lombardy. Both are external to this working group, they were invited as they are involved in respectively ERRIN and Vanguard⁵.
4. Wrap-up on the lessons learned and conclusions; next steps.

Following this WG meeting, we will start preparing the second WG meeting at the end November in Barcelona (29th November following the S3 Forum on 28th November). We will interact with all WG members to better define the second challenge (a combination of “Money” & “Ecosystem”, see Figures 2 and 3 above) and will invite participants to present. In order to keep broadening our discussion, we may invite also representatives of the European Commission (DG Regio) to our November meeting, as well as representatives of Interreg Europe. A major part of our discussion at the end of this first year should focus on our ability to identify key challenges, seek and discuss possible responses and consolidate our lessons learned into recommended operational practices attacking identified challenges for the WG regions. Due to the diversity and experience of the WG members, It is expected that the WG’s analysis and possible solutions will provide useful information, analysis and actions for regions throughout Europe.

⁵ The involvement of ERRIN and Vanguard Initiative members was discussed by the WG coordinating team with both networks in July 2023 and will benefit the WG by bringing in relevant experience and case studies into the group while also communicating the WG discussions to a wider audience.

5. Annexes: questionnaires

A1. Questionnaire prior to Kick-off (sent on 31st May 2023)

Name:	Region:
Email:	Organisation:
	Please respond by bullet points or numbered list – see below
<p>1. Regional context – a rapid summary –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial dimension – periphery/centre/north/south/east/west • Regional competitiveness⁶ – above or below average • Regional innovation 	•
<p>2. Possible benefits for your region in interregional partnerships - list up to 5 with 1. Being most important</p>	1.
<p>3. Your direct/indirect experience in interregional partnerships – rate yourself as experienced, some experience, involved, aware...and domains of collaboration.</p>	•
<p>4. Implementation challenges for interregional partnerships from your regional perspective – list up to 5 with 1 being most important.</p>	1.
<p>5. Is your region/organisation considering developing a proposal linked to the 'Regional Innovation Valleys' e.g. The European Innovation</p>	Yes / No / Don't Know

⁶ [EU Regional Competitiveness Index 2.0 - 2022 edition \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)
[Regional innovation scoreboard \(europa.eu\)](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&plugin=1)

Ecosystems (EIE) or the I3 calls recently published on May 17th? ⁷	
6. Assets that you will personally bring to the WG.	•
7. What are the outputs/outcomes as a whole that you would like to see coming from the WG?	•
8. Can we quote your name or region /organisation regarding the above information in a future written or oral report?	Yes/ No

A2. Questionnaire prior to first WG meeting (sent on 19th June 2023): Unpacking capacity for interregional collaboration

Issue under 'Capacity' implementation challenge for interregional collaboration	Your ranking: 1 most important 5 least important	I would like to present at the next meeting in September. Mark YES on the topic and add brief key bullet points in column
1. Peer learning – how to improve the processes? How to establish training on inter-cultural communication between regions? How to achieve common understanding of concepts and words? In my region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-eie-2023-connect-03-01;callCode=null;freeTextSearchKeyword=valleys;matchWholeText=true;typeCodes=0,1,2,8;statusCodes=31094501,31094502;programmePeriod=null;programCcm2Id=null;programDivisionCode=null;focusAreaCode=null;destinationGroup=null;missionGroup=null;geographicalZonesCode=null;programmeDivisionProspect=null;startDateLte=null;startDateGte=null;crossCuttingPriorityCode=null;cpvCode=null;performanceOfDelivery=null;sortQuery=sortStatus;orderBy=asc;onlyTenders=false;topicListKey=topicSearchTablePageState>

<p>2. What inter-regional governance structures are most effective? In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>3. How do we move from a 'one-person game' to a more institutional/sustainable format in a region? What regional governance structures are most effective?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>4. How do we better involve regional agencies or intermediaries in interregional collaboration?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>5. How to strengthen the engagement of regional stakeholders? How to ensure commitment once "saturation point" is reached?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>6. How to measure return on investment? How to better communicate the benefits of interregional collaboration? Are 'quick wins' part of the answer and how?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>7. At what scale – level of granularity - should we look for interregional collaboration e.g. cross border joint S3s, programmes, action lines, projects? How to maintain a 'fil rouge' (key themes) in partnerships?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>8. How to overcome the peripherality challenge ? How to involve less experienced regions?</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>9. Other: 1</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		
<p>10. Other: 2</p> <p>In my region:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Xx • xx 		