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Procedia Computer Science 104 (2017) 227 – 234

Procedia Computer Science

ICTE 2016, December 2016, Riga, Latvia

Towards a Regional Innovation Strategies Modelling

Tanja Woronowicz[a,*], Michael Boronowsky[a], David Wewezer[a], Antanas Mitasiunas[b], Karsten Seidel[c], Ignacio Rada Cotera[c]

[a]*Universität Bremen, 28359 Bremen, Germany*
[b]*MitSoft, 08316 Vilnius, Lithuania*
[c]*IkerConsulting, 48008 Bilbao, Spain*

Abstract

This paper presents the methodical approach of an INTERREG project aiming to improve the implementation and evaluation of European Research & Innovation strategies. The P2L2 project applies interregional policy learning and exchange of experiences on aspects influencing the regional innovation ecosystems in the field of advanced materials. The key enabling technology “advanced materials” complements the regional economic and research tissue of six participating regions with a stable opportunity for future growth and jobs. P2L2 goes beyond traditional 'good practice sharing' and results are expected not only to improve policy instruments. All activities related to the definition, implementation and evaluation of the RIS3 and smart specialization strategies are described in terms of an ISO/IEC 330xx conformant Process Reference and Assessment Model (PRM/PAM).

The improved process capability aligns regional policies and strategies between sectors in order to facilitate the establishment of real innovation ecosystems beyond administrative regional boundaries and identifies overlaps, gaps and complimentarily for European collaboration.

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Peer-review under responsibility of organizing committee of the scientific committee of the international conference; ICTE 2016

Keywords: Research and innovation; Smart specialisation strategy; Entrepreneurial discovery process; Process capability maturity modeling; Process reference model; Process assessment model

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49-421-218-64094; fax: +49-421-218-64095.
E-mail address: worono@uni-bremen.de

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Peer-review under responsibility of organizing committee of the scientific committee of the international conference; ICTE 2016
doi:10.1016/j.procs.2017.01.118

1. Introduction

The work described in this paper is part of the INTERREG EUROPE Project "Public Policy Living Lab" (P2L2). The project has started in 2016 and is running for four years. The overall objective of the P2L2 project is to improve the effectiveness of regional development policies in fostering research and innovation in advanced materials and related sectors thereby contributing to the economic modernization and increased competitiveness of Europe. Advanced materials have been identified as one of the priority areas in many Research and Innovation Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3)[1] and have developed to a vital field of activity. P2L2 is coordinated by the Innovation Capability Center of the University of Bremen and brings together ten partners from six European countries (Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, Lithuania and Poland). The following sub-objectives will be achieved:

- Improved, coordinated and more effective innovation policies fostering on regional level through evidence-based policy-making by applying a process oriented approach to RIS3 definition and implementation
- New knowledge of the European innovation supporting mechanism and how to coordinate and align them, by exchanging experiences between partner regions and developing a joint information base

Pioneers of Research and Innovation Smart Specialization Strategies stress the fact that RIS3 definition and implementation is a process oriented activity. This idea is confirmed by many authors from Dani Rodrik who declares: „When it comes to industrial policy, specifying the process is more important than specifying the outcome"[2] to Roberta Capello and Henning Kroll: „As one of the founding fathers of Regional Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization (RIS3) Dominique Foray claims that RIS3 is „largely about the policy process to select and prioritize fields or areas whether a cluster of activities should be developed, and to let entrepreneurials discover the right domain of future specialization"[3]. Such characteristics of the area give the ground for the P2L2 project to apply a process capability maturity modeling approach for RIS3 improvement as a process oriented activity. Therefore, one core activity is a limited mapping, i.e. policy evaluation methodology of the RIS3 policy instruments of the participating regions. Starting from the RIS3 strategies of the regions, the project identifies activities, initiatives and practices the partner regions have used to support innovation in advanced materials domain. This will allow to identify the best possible policy climate for fostering innovation in priority areas and mainstream this into policy recommendations and a strategic policy framework.

This paper describes the initial steps towards a methodology to address the process capability of activities related the RIS3 development, implementation and monitoring. The process oriented approach provides a solid starting point for regional analysis in the participating regions. Guiding principle of this approach is to analyze the process capability of a regional innovation eco-system to develop a strong and successful RIS3 – following the ideas of quality management that "product quality is the result of processes quality"[4].

1.1. The need for policy learning

Innovation policy is a strongly interconnected area. In Interreg IVC Report[5] it is described that systemic approaches are currently the most accepted models for promoting the development, diffusion and efficient use of new products and processes. The different actors in an innovation system are part of a very complex network of relations and dependencies. Developing innovation policies therefore has to deal with this complexity in an adequate way. In Capelleo et. al[6] it is stated "that many regions have faced notable difficulties in implementing e.g. RIS3 strategies for reasons related to lack of interest, lack of ability and general politics" and that "with great likelihood, therefore, many RIS3 exercises that had been implemented at inadequate […] levels of governance, in political cultures averse to bottom-up participation or simply in regions where limited administrative and professional capacities precluded meaningful RIS3 processes from the outset will fade out and, at some point in time, become discontinued".

Based on this observation a basic assumption of the P2L2 project is that the development of a suitable research and innovation strategy needs a certain capability on personal, organizational but also on system level. Furthermore, to be able to manage the development of a RIS and to monitor and improve this process accordingly, a management framework on different dimensions is needed. In these terms process improvement can be understood as "policy learning".

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