Online S3

Newsletter

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Northern Netherlands Pilot

The Northern Netherlands Alliance (SNN) joined the project after successfully applying to an open call from the Online-S3 consortium. As a pilot for Online-S3, SNN is charged with mobilizing its stakeholders in the region to experiment with the platform and provide valuable feedback.

Collaboration is at the heart of the Northern Netherlands' regional innovation strategy (RIS3): bringing businesses, knowledge centers and preferably end-users together in innovative environments where open innovation and entrepreneurial discoveries are stimulated. The aim is to create a fertile ecosystem for innovation in the Northern Netherlands.

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Contents

Rationale

To create such an innovation ecosystem in the region, stakeholder engagement is key. The Online-S3 project provided us with the means to (re-)commit enthusiastic stakeholders in strengthening the philosophy and implementation of smart specialization in the Northern Netherlands. In their experimentation with the apps and tool on the platform, our stakeholders could become (re-)acquainted with our RIS3 and the philosophy behind it. In this way, the project could function as a mechanism to facilitate EDP, and to contribute to the creation of an ecosystem for innovation.

Training phase

In the training phase of our piloting experience, we developed our stakeholder engagement strategy. This strategy was designed in close cooperation with our pilot trainer, Slovak Business Agency (SBA). First, we mapped the different stakeholder groups we aimed to reach. Accordingly, we developed different engagement approaches per stakeholder group.

❖ **Key stakeholders approach** | ± 9 'key' stakeholders | via personal meeting
❖ **Civil society approach** | ± 14 civil society stakeholders | via workshop
❖ **Interregional projects approach** | ± 13 'interregional' stakeholders | via workshop
❖ **Policymakers approach** | ± 26 policymakers | via workshop

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Figure 1 Condensed Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for Consultation (SNN)

Not all applications and tools were deemed relevant for all types of stakeholders. Therefore, we made a selection of apps and tools that were to be tested by a particular type of stakeholder. We mainly focused on apps and tools in phase 2: analysis of context, phase 3: strategy formulation, phase 4: priority setting and phase 5: policy mix. We found that tool 2.1 'Regional assets mapping' was applicable for a broad audience, and therefore tested by the largest number.

Experimentation phase

In the experimentation phase, we consulted our stakeholders through workshops, masterclasses and personal meetings. In general, our stakeholders were quite positive about the aim of the platform, as it

simplifies the rather abstract theory of smart specialisation. The platform makes smart specialisation a lot more tangible, easy-to-understand and 'applicable'. This feedback shows that, obviously, there is need for assistance in translating the theory of smart specialisation into a policy instrument.

Tool 2.1 'Regional assets mapping' was not only tested widely, but it also turned out to be the most well-received solution. The positive feedback referred mostly to its clean and easy-to-use lay-out, and the usefulness of the generated content. More broadly, the tools within phases 2 and 4 proved to be most useful. Piloting the Online-S3 project taught us that our stakeholders feel a need for making interregional comparisons and for the visualization of data.

Of course, our users also pointed us to some challenges. The platform is perceived as rather complex, due to several reasons. For example, many of the tools require specific knowledge on smart specialization, structural funds or regional characteristics. This knowledge is available to only a few people in the region. Also, the different formats, long guides and the use of technical language adds to the complexity and the perceived lack of user-friendliness of the platform. This could be easily solved by designing a general format to the tools and guides, and designating an editor to deal with the language issues. We collected and analyzes all of our stakeholders' feedback, which we then compiled into an assessment report – with the help of SBA.

Benefits

As outlined before, the rationale of the Northern Netherlands to participate in the project relied on the premise that the platform could provide us with the means to (re-)commit enthusiastic stakeholders in strengthening the philosophy and implementation of smart specialization in the Northern Netherlands. Indeed, as the project progressed, we were able to lay the foundation of an eventual revising of our RIS3. The project allowed us to (re-)activate our stakeholders by (re-)acquainting them with the goals and aims formulated in our RIS3.

The final steps

Now that our piloting phase in drawing to an end, we are looking back at this project with content. Not only did the project help us re-engage our stakeholders with smart specialization, it also re-acquainted ourselves with the methods and ideas related to designing and implementing a RIS3. Furthermore, we were pleased to take part in a multiregional project that broadened our network, and we were particularly happy with the help and cooperation of our pilot trainer SBA.

Even though the platform might still need some refinement and has some final steps to take, we believe that it could be a helpful tool for policymakers in developing or updating their RIS3 in the future.

ONLINE S3 project aims to develop an e-policy platform augmented with a toolbox of applications and online services, which will assist national and regional authorities in the EU in elaborating or revising their smart specialisation agenda, in terms of policies and strategy.

ONLINE S3 Project

http://www.onlines3.eu

ONLINE S3 Platform

http://www.s3platform.eu/