

## Positionspapper om smart specialisering

### Norra Mellansverige

#### Hittills

- Smart specialisering har varit ett viktigt verktyg för stärkt samverkan mellan näringsliv, akademi och offentlig sektor i Norra Mellansverige.
- Arbets sättet har varit särskilt framgångsrikt i att möjliggöra större interregionalt samarbete, i synnerhet inom ramen för Vanguardinitiativet.
- Särskilda fördelar med smart specialisering är att arbets sättet kan balansera högteknologiska sektorer som klassiskt associerats med innovation med ett ökat fokus på innovation inom tjänstedrivna sektorer som besöksnäring och välfärd.

#### Framöver

- Medan vi måste ha förståelse för att det är viktigt att mäta och demonstrera resultaten av smart specialisering så är det viktigt att lätta och kortsiktiga resultat inte blir styrande för själva arbets sättet. Smart specialisering syftar till långsiktigt transformativt arbete inom en bredd sektorer och så måste uppföljningsmekanismerna vara anpassade till detta arbets sätt. Alla som är inblandade i genomförandet av smart specialisering, inklusive EU-kommissionen, måste säkerställa att vi undviker ett fokus på generiska indikatorer som skevt gynnar vissa etablerade sektorer och hämmar sökandet efter nya, innovativa områden. Inspiration för alternativa modeller att mäta kan gå att finna i den utvärderingsmodell för kluster som utvecklades inom ramen för SLIM-projektet i Norra Mellansverige.
- Det är viktigt att fortsätta involvera fler politikområden och nya aktörer, i synnerhet universitet och högskolor, i arbetet med smart specialisering.
- Det finns flera intressanta europeiska initiativ med utgångspunkt i smart specialisering som är viktiga att arbeta vidare med, så som Vanguardinitiativet och de tematiska smart specialiseringsplattformarna. Det är också viktigt att befintliga instrument i Europa för forskning och innovation, inklusive Horisont 2020, i större uträkning likriktas för att minska uppsplittring av insatser och skapa synergier.
- Det krävs också en större flexibilitet, främst i projekt som finansieras av ESI-fonderna, för deltagande från en större bredd av aktörer med olika förutsättningar. I våra erfarenheter kan exempelvis för rigida krav på tidrapportering och OH-kostnader hämma deltagandet från företag och lärosäten.
- Smart specialisering har hittills varit en fråga främst på regional och europeisk nivå och i mindre utsträckning på nationell nivå. Vi välkomnar EU-kommissionen som en dialogpartner i diskussionen kring vilken roll nationell nivå kan ha i stöttandet av regionerna i arbetet med smart specialisering.
- Vi tror att betydligt mer kan göras för att integrera genusperspektiv och andra horisontella utmaningsdrivna perspektiv i forskning och innovation och smart specialisering. I Norra Mellansverige finns det många goda exempel på detta arbete och vi välkomnar samarbete med europeiska samarbete för att stärka dessa kopplingar.

#### Stöd

- Vi stödjer helt ett fortsatt och fördjupat arbete med smart specialisering I denna och kommande programperiod, och är redo att vara en aktiv partner till EU-kommissionen och våra andra europeiska partners.

# Position paper on smart specialisation

## North Middle Sweden

### Up to this point

- Smart specialisation has proven to be an effective and transformative tool for increased research and innovation (R&I) contributing to higher competitiveness on the regional and European level. The approach has been successful in refining priorities and achieving a more long-term and systematic approach to R&I policy.
- In our regions smart specialisation have furthermore been key to greater cooperation between business, academia and public organisations. In Värmland, the process has led to the development of the Academy for Smart Specialisation where the regional authority and the university is co-investing in joint projects with strong ties to business within the regional specialisations. Several strategic projects are operational and more are being developed in all specialisations. In Dalarna, thematic groupings of stakeholders within regional specialisations have been established, allowing for development of strategic projects and increased uptake of horizontal priorities. The work was described in the booklet *Smart Stories* published by the S3-Platform.
- Smart specialisation has been particularly successful in enabling interregional cooperation and internationalisation (within Europe). This is not least evidenced by the incremental success of the Vanguard Initiative, where Dalarna is a member since 2014 and Värmland is finalising their membership in 2017. It should be noted that both political memberships were founded on and preceded by interest and operational work in the pilot projects, i.e. business interest, represented by cluster organisations and science parks.
- We particularly welcome the width of areas covered by the approach. While highly applicable and relevant in high technology sectors, smart specialisation has also proven an effective tool to capture and increase the innovativeness in service-driven sectors, such as tourism and welfare services. The adaption of R&I policies to these areas however need to address new challenges, since they traditionally have been less covered by R&I policy. Continued and increased support from the European Commission in these areas are therefore important.

### Looking forward

#### *Monitoring*

- We recognise the need of all practitioners of smart specialisation, including and not least the European Commission, to successfully measure and communicate the results of smart specialisation. However, it is important to proceed in this endeavour with an approach that is conducive to long-term success and that is aligned with the concept of smart specialisation itself. The approach to monitoring must be done based on innovative ways of monitoring, capturing not just output but also short- and long-term effects. An overt focus on short-term, standardised and generic indicators, such as new jobs, growth and new firms, may cause an unbalanced search for quick fixes and quick results. This approach would decrease the likelihood of finding new niche capabilities and markets; incentivise picking winners and path-dependent partners over exploring new value chains; a return to traditional and easy-to-measure business sectors instead of key enabling technologies and market areas; and tilt the playing field towards sectors that fit top-down indicators instead of indicators that fit bottom-up areas of strength, thereby reversing much of the gains in smart specialisation. Any approach to measuring the implementation of smart specialisation must recognise long term and transformative outcomes as the necessary and sufficient variable to judge its success. As regions, we are willing to stand up for this principle.

- An alternative approach is possible and some inspiration can be found in the method that was developed in North-Middle Sweden to measure cluster performance. The method is based on triangulation of methodological approaches which offers mutual control and balances a short-term evaluation with trends and long term outputs.<sup>1</sup> For instance, by comparing perceived effect in addressing innovation gaps with real financial and non-financial performance, clear connections between certain activities and real performance became visible, thereby making trends more accessible as well. We are currently working with a project covering the whole of North-Middle Sweden to explore the possibilities of adapting aspects of the methodological approach to smart specialisation.

#### *Beyond regional policy*

- The impact of smart specialisation in multiple policy-areas outside of regional policy, most naturally European R&I policy, but also Growth, Energy and Education is one of the most important developments in Europe. It is important that this development continues moving forward.
- We like to emphasise that research policy and the role of universities can be further developed. Universities have a very important role to play in smart specialisation. They are *the* central link to the supply of high skilled competences needed in smart specialisation. They are furthermore one of the most important actors in cocreation and bridging the gap between research and market and/or societal value. Several projects have enabled researchers to study smart specialisation. However, following the period since the original paper by Dominique Foray in 2009 until now, there have been a vast knowledge production around the concept. Therefore, resources for researchers *on* smart specialisation should be complemented with resources for researches *in* smart specialisation. This could entail more research in specialisations. In this context, the Academy for Smart Specialisation is once again an important illustration of how this dynamic can be explored. It could also entail partnering processes between regional authorities, academia and business from regions with similar profiles or specialisations, for instance through networking projects. Currently, the same project referenced above is pursuing a networking exercise between universities and cluster organisations in Dalarna, Gävleborg and Värmland.

#### *European initiatives*

- The many European initiatives linked to smart specialisation are a testament to its success in mobilising engagement and resources. The Vanguard Initiative is the prime example of this. The thematic S3-Platforms that was built on the same methodology is a further welcome development. We believe that these initiatives, with the potential addition of platforms in other thematic areas and new initiatives like the Vanguard Initiative, constitutes a good foundation for deepening the implementation of smart specialisation.
- We believe that the success of the work is also dependent on the alignment between these initiatives and other existing instruments. Most notably the alignment of parts of Horizon 2020 and future Framework Programmes to smart specialisation would be very rewarding in creating synergies between ESIF and Framework Programmes. One possibility could be to give the initiatives similar roles to the private consortiums in the contractual PPP's. It is worth recalling that one of the core objectives of smart specialisation was less fragmentation of resources on R&I and increased concentration. The same logic should now apply to existing instruments for its implementation. We stress that we do not believe that there are too many instruments linked to smart specialisation at this moment and indeed we welcome continued

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the triangulation model can be found in Sölvell, Ö., Williams, M. (2013) Building the Cluster Commons – An Evaluation of 12 Cluster Organizations in Sweden 2005 - 2012. Stockholm: Ivory Tower Publishers. Accessible at <http://www.clusterobservatory.eu/index.html> Last accessed 2017-02-15.

establishment of more thematic platforms. Going forward the main objective however should be alignment of platforms, funding and other support.

- In line with the preceding comments, it is also necessary to allow for flexibility, particularly in ESI-funded projects, to facilitate participation of a more diverse range of stakeholders. For instance, in our experience overly standardised rules on overhead costs and timesheet requirements can have adverse effects on participation of universities and businesses. The same logic is applicable to indicators (see also the comments about monitoring above). We believe that increased flexibility between different types of stakeholders is possible without increased risks, and indeed, an important tool in incentivising participation of decisive actors.

#### *Multilevel Governance*

- The design and implementation have so far largely been a priority at regional and European level. We are largely referring to the situation in Sweden, but this is generally the governance structure in other parts of Europe, based on our experience. We very much welcome this direct dialogue and cooperation with the European Commission, both from DG Regio, but also from DG Grow, DG Research and of course the JRC through the S3-Platform. We would ask the European Commission to also keep a dialogue with the member-states on how the national level in the member-state can support our regional work on smart specialisation. In Sweden, this discussion is ongoing and the European Commission could be an important partner in this dialogue to achieve an efficient multilevel governance.

#### *Horizontal social issues*

- We believe that much more can be done to strengthen the integration of the principles equality and non-discrimination in R&I policy and smart specialisation. Gender integration in innovation policy have tremendous potential for strengthening innovation and social cohesion and progress. North-Middle Sweden have actively been pursuing these issues. Värmland was the first region in Europe to carry out a review of the smart specialisation strategy from a gender perspective<sup>2</sup>. Dalarna have integrated a gender perspective in the prioritisation of knowledge areas. Gävleborg has several activities related to questions of norm criticism related to leadership in the innovation system. The practices are continually spread across the regions and we are convinced that the lessons can have value for European partners and welcome cooperation on this issue.

#### *Endorsements*

- We fully support a continued and deepened work on smart specialisation in this programme period and the next, and are willing to be an active partner to the European Commission, our European partner regions, the networks and initiatives, such as ERRIN and the Vanguard Initiative that are instrumental in bringing the collaborative and transformative process to fruition

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<sup>2</sup> According to experts at the S3-Platform.



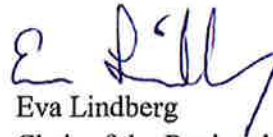
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