Smart Spec

Peer Reviews for Smart Specialisation Strategies

What is the issue?

Peer reviews are critical examinations, followed by policy recommendations, about innovation systems and policies in a country or region, undertaken by "peers", namely by persons in charge of such policies in other countries or regions. The question is: can these methods be used to support the design and the implementation of smart specialisation strategies?

Why is it important?

Smart specialisation strategies are experimental: there is no agreed model on how to best design or implement such strategies. From this arises the need to review and examine the relevance and effectiveness of such "trial-and-error" strategies on a continuous basis. However monitoring and evaluation systems for such complex policies are not yet well developed. Peer review methods, which have been practiced since a long time, can help fill this need.

What do we know about peer reviews for research and innovation?

Peer reviews for research and innovation support countries and regions in improving their policies by learning from foreign practice. They are voluntary (both peers and reviewed country/region act on a voluntary basis); participative (actors in the reviewed country/region are mobilized and contribute to the exercise); they involve both experts with a broad view on topics under review and peers with practical experience in such topics; they combine analysis and exchanges of practice; and are organized in three steps. All three steps need to be present for those exercises to be effective.

Rules for effective peer-reviewing

To be effective, peer reviews for S3 have to meet several success conditions:

1. Pay attention to all three-phases/six tasks as part of the exercise, in particular the last phase
2. Get a balanced mix of experts with right expertise and peers coming from countries sharing similarities with reviewed country
3. Be aware of costs and timing issues: such exercises are costly and have to take place at the right time in the policy cycle
4. Start with a clear and agreed definition of the focus of the exercise
5. Capitalize on other peer reviews to benefit from knowledge accumulation
6. Rest on strong political ownership and commitment.

Learning journey report: Matera, IT

The latest "**Learning Journey**" took place in the spectacular setting of Matera, a UNESCO world heritage centre, located in the region of Basilicata, Italy. The topic of the two day discussion was the role of creative clusters in smart specialisation strategies. In the first day, Prof Kevin Morgan and Prof Fiorenza Belussi joined the representatives of the 10 regions participating in the learning journey for a day of intense debate and sharing of ideas.

The second day brought together a large number of representatives from Matera, including policy makers, entrepreneurs and social activists, to discuss how the city is building on its unique heritage to create opportunities for economic development. The challenges on attracting creative people and offering them opportunities was particularly relevant and provided useful lessons for all partners.

Project website: www.cardiff.ac.uk/cplan/research/smartspec