
Policy lessons from experimentation with Regional Programmes for Innovative Actions (RPIA)

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*WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT WORKS IN THE EU COHESION POLICY 2007-2013:
DISCOVERIES AND LESSONS FOR 2014-2020.*

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Context for the RPIAs

- The concept of **National Innovation Systems** developed in the beginning of 1990s – systemic approach to innovation replaced the dominant linear understanding of innovation: interaction of diverse organisations (private companies, R&D organisations, public authorities, universities, etc.), shaped by a set of formal and informal institutions;
 - The concept of **Regional Innovation System** developed in the late 1990s – exploitation of regional innovation potential by interaction between various regional actors and mutual learning;
 - **New innovation policies** justified by systemic imperfections (instead of market imperfections), e.g. infrastructural shortcomings, obstacles to knowledge transfer, lock-in problems, network problems, institutional deficiencies, etc.
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Regional Innovation Strategies in the 1990s

- 6 Regional Technology Plans 1993-1994;
 - 33 Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS) in 1996 and 1999;
 - 25 RIS+ projects (implementation of RIS) in 1999;
 - Regional Innovation Society Initiative (RISI);
 - Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Strategy (RITTS) 1994-1999 funded by DG ENTR;
 - By spending a small additional sum of money (ERDF) on fostering **innovation policy making capacity** and networking key players, the objective was to increase the effectiveness of regional policy efforts and public spending towards innovation activities;
 - Building regional innovation systems;
 - Methodological and behavioural goals of RIS.
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RPIA 2000-2006 I

- A first coordinated attempt of the Commission to approach all real European regions (EU15) at NUTS2 or NUTS1 level;
 - The idea was to provide additional ERDF funding for the programming period 2000-2006 to support the regions in applying a trail-and-error method and developing new, innovative policy approaches (Article 4, Regulation (EC) No 1783/1999);
 - The innovative actions programmes (RPIA) were designed and implemented directly by regional stakeholders;
 - The RPIA should have had an experimental character, i.e. they should be risky and need to be tested before possible mainstreaming;
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RPIA 2000-2006 II

- Three priority fields:
 1. *Regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation;*
 2. *The information society at the service of regional development: e-EuropeRegio;*
 3. *Regional identity and sustainable development;*
 - 177 approved RPIA implemented by 149 eligible EU15 regions (out of 155), 28 regions implemented two programmes;
 - Total ERDF contribution around €420m, 0.4% of total ERDF allocation 2000-2006, max ERDF contribution per programme €3m.
 - By closure of 146 by February 2010 estimated total expenditures amounted to more than €800m;
 - No longer any separate ERDF line in the current period 2007-2013
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Assessment Methodology

Selection of a **representative sample** consisting of 24 programmes; in-depth analysis of each selected RPIA. In addition, 10 case studies of good practices;

Assessment of three relevant areas:

- **Governance:** Design and programming, Partnerships and implementation, Multilevel governance; Evaluation and Monitoring.
- **Innovative methods:** Innovativeness of the RPIA strategy, Innovative implementation practices;
- **Value added and Impact:** Impact on mainstream OP in the 2007-2013 period, the number of good practices, sustainability of specific measures, partnerships, or methods continued to operate after the closure of the programme.

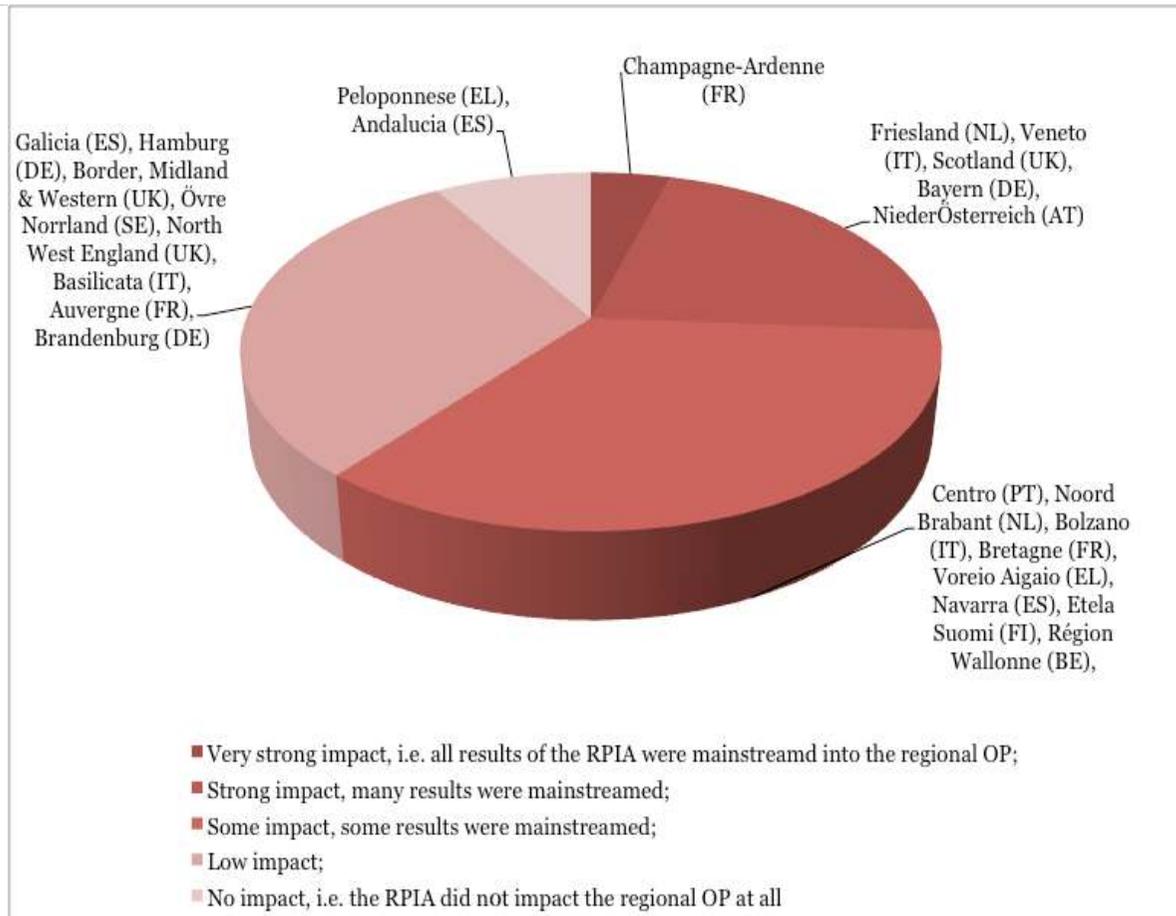
Analysis based on internal Commission's documents, relevant publicly available regional sources, around 80 semi-structured interviews with RPIA managers and other regional stakeholders.

RPIA: Main findings I

In most cases low or average impact of the RPIAs on the mainstream operational programmes

- The relatively low involvement of the mainstream OP management authorities in the design and implementation of the RPIAs (e.g. Brandenburg, Centro, North-West);
 - A mismatch between the time when the RPIAs produced results and the ‘windows of opportunity’ for their potential uptake into mainstream programmes (e.g. Brandenburg, Andalucia, Navarra, Centro, Nord-West-England, Border Midland and Western).
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RPIA: Main findings I



RPIA: Main findings II

RPIA that were ‘embedded’ in a pre-existing strategic framework performed better and were more sustainable

- **Prior experience** with previous rounds of ‘innovative actions’ was a factor underpinning higher performing RPIA with more sustainable results and long-term impact (e.g. Lower Austria, Scotland, Hamburg, Centro, etc.);
 - The RPIA with the highest number of good and innovative practices were clearly **anchored in a regional innovation and/or development plan** context (Navarra, Etela Suomi, Bavaria, Andalucia).
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RPIA: Main findings III

Positive influence of the quality of partnerships and governance

- The **quality of partnerships** proved to be a positive influence on the number of good practices (e.g. Lower Austria; Bavaria, Navarra, Scotland);
 - **Mobilisation** of a critical mass of relevant stakeholders did not always translate into an enduring commitment (e.g. Peloponnese, Auvergne, Galicia);
 - Successful RPIAs in regions with varying degrees of ‘formal powers’;
 - The **greater freedom of the RPIA** partnerships vis-à-vis the national authorities than in the mainstream OPs resulted in greater flexibility to implement novel policy options.
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RPIA: Main findings IV

Negligible influence of the RPIAs' context in terms of level of development and scale of regions

- Positive outcomes in almost all **regions irrespective of levels of development**;
 - However, on average the outcomes of RPIA in **more innovative regions proved more sustainable**;
 - The RPIA tended to produce cumulative, non radical innovations in the 'more innovative' regions, whereas in 'less innovative' regions more "radical and ground breaking";
 - No discernable effects due to the size of regions: good practices in both smaller and larger regions.
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Key conclusion I

The innovative actions led to **an appreciable impact in all regions assisted** and in a number of cases this impact has led to sustained structural changes to the way regional policy is designed and delivered.

However, initially **‘stronger’ regions made the most** out of the additional ERDF funding, while **less developed regions struggled to sustain partnerships** and hence results from the programmes.

Key conclusion II

The **impact on the mainstream ERDF programmes was less than hoped** for and the synergies with other EU funding instruments negligible.

The **RPIA remained peripheral** to the mainstream ‘policy-making’ circuits and, crucially, **the timing** of the RPIA was ‘out of synch’ with the programming cycle making it difficult to feed-in to ongoing programmes or influence the 2007-13 plans.

Key conclusion III

The **long-term nature** of the investment required in improving regional partnerships and policy-making capacities is evident and **cumulative effects of various rounds of funding** were identified in those programmes that performed the best.

If the aim of Cohesion Policy is to ‘close the gap’ then an on-going and sustained investment in ‘**governance capacities**’ in the regions racing to ‘catch-up’ is required. This needs to be done in a way that ‘breaking-the-mould’ and ‘**risk-taking**’ is encouraged. A European dimension is vital to inspire regions to break free from well-engrained but non-optimal ‘national policy practices’.

Recommendation I

‘Seed capital’ for the ‘innovators of policy’ is necessary if policy is to foster innovation

- Ideally, a future round of IA should be developed as a programme guided and over-seen by the Commission services through direct contracts with regional partnerships ;
- Funding of IA should be competitive and seek to identify those approaches that are truly novel, innovative and risk-taking.

Recommendation II

Future IA should be foster ‘concurrent engineering’ putting into production new ideas and measure in the mainstream SF programmes

- A new round of IA type programmes should be designed and operate concurrently to the mainstream ERDF programmes;
- All Structural Funds programmes should set aside or ring-fence funding that can be used to ‘bring on stream’ the new measures developed through the IA partnerships at any time during the programming period;
- The mainstream Structural Fund managers should be closely involved in monitoring the outcomes of the IA in their region and organise a process whereby the actions tested can be brought into the mainstream OP.

Recommendation III

The quality and scope of partnerships is the “conditio sine qua non” of a successful innovative action

- The Commission services can play a crucial role in mediating and steering regional partnerships towards open and inclusive forms of partnerships by setting strict ‘governance’ criteria for selection of future IA programmes;
 - Monitoring and process evaluations of the IA programmes should report regularly on the performance of the partnerships and ensure that pre-emptive measures are taken to correct possible dysfunctions;
 - Part of the technical assistance and coaching provided to the IA by ‘inter-regional’ supporting actions should be focused specifically on training and advice on partnership activities.
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Recommendation IV

Professional networks and specialised coaching of regional partnerships is required to secure a return on investment

- The Commission should integrate and link a future round of regional IA to transnational co-operation (INTEREG, Regions for Economic Change, etc.) and ‘joint-programming/implementation networks’ supported through programmes such as ERA-NETS, Inno-Nets, Regions for Knowledge, etc.;
- One or more technical secretariats could be created to provide a pool of expertise able to act as coaches, process consultants or specialised advisors to the IA projects.

Recommendation V

Future ‘innovative actions’ must act as ‘integrators’ of Cohesion Policy with other EU instruments

- Future IA partnerships must be required to deliver a programme that integrates from the proposal stage a detailed approach to ensure synergies between all possible sources of funding at operational level;
- Specific time and resources should be set aside in the work-programme and a clear exit strategy should be defined at an inception report phase of each action on how all possible sources of (EU) public-private funding will be used to guarantee the sustainability of the programme results.

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Thank you

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