

Lessons and policy options from experimentation with Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions

Thematic summary of the project

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1. Introduction and general orientation

The subject of this paper is to present methodological approach and results of the ex-post assessment of Regional Programmes for Innovative Actions (RPIA) implemented in 2000-2006 under the Article 4 of Regulation (EC) 1783/1999 on European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). The lessons and policy options are expected to contribute to the development of the post-2013 EU Cohesion policy. The study was commissioned to Technopolis Group by the European Commission, DG REGIO. The project coordinator, Tomasz JERZYNIAK, was supported by a team of international experts responsible for collecting relevant data at the regional level.

The RPIA accounted for 0.4% of total ERDF allocation, which was independent on allocations to Objectives 1, 2 and 3. The RPIA were placed in the context of regional innovation initiatives launched by the Commission in the 1990s, however, it had been the first time that the Commission addressed all real (functional) regions at NUTS2 or where appropriate NUTS 1 level. The objective was to support the EU15 regions to devise new regional policy measures – laboratory of ideas, as well as encourage experimentation with new approaches and enable regional policy makers to test a new role as a catalyst rather than prescribing policies and programmes. The policy tools were expected to focus on actions that were genuinely innovative and implemented by public and private partnerships with the aim to mainstream successful practices in regular regional operational programmes (ROP). Each RPIA was provided with a maximum of €3m funding from ERDF for a 2-years period. In 2007-2013 the RPIAs do not have a separate ERDF line.

The study draws lessons and develops policy options from the experimentation with appropriate strategies, policies and implementation schemes, as well as good practices in the RPIA's three strategic themes: Knowledge-based regional economies, Information society and regional development, Regional identity and sustainable development.

2. Research scope

2.1 Research scope and methodology

The study analysed all 177 RPIAs at an aggregate level, and a representative sample consisting of 24 programmes was the subject of a detailed, in-depth scrutiny. The creation of the sample was based on a number of relevant criteria: full coverage of the Member States, appropriate relative weight of the strategic themes and geographical distribution, socioeconomic profile in terms of GDP/capita differentiating between Objective 1 and 2 regions, level of regional innovativeness, governance and degree of regionalisation, size of the region in terms of population, experience with previous regional EU strategies (RIS, RISI, etc.).

The research methods were desk analysis of publicly available information sources, final reports submitted to the European Commission, internal documentation from the Commission (check-lists, submitted applications, financial summaries), as well as around 90 semi-structured interviews with all 24 programme managers, and other involved regional stakeholders from public, private and third sectors (e.g. R&D and innovation agencies, universities, evaluators, private companies, foundations, beneficiaries).

2.2 Research areas

The assessment focused on three areas; each of them consisted of a set of specific research questions developed in the light of relevant studies and academic literature.

2.2.1 Governance and partnership

It was assumed that the successful realisation of a programme required a specific administrative and management capacity, networking and mobilisation of relevant stakeholders, and evidence-based programme design in line with the specific regional needs:

- Design and programming (e.g. driving factors to launch the RPIA, degree of involvement of various regional stakeholders, etc.);
- Partnership mobilisation and quality (e.g. achievement of critical mass of relevant stakeholders, quality of partnership, flexibility and evolution of partnership, etc.);
- Multilevel governance and external cooperation (e.g. involvement of the Commission, national authorities, cooperation with other regions);
- Monitoring and effects of evaluation (e.g. use of evaluation results).

2.2.2 Innovative Methods

The subject of the analysis was the scale and scope of methodological experimentation in terms of widening and deepening in regional innovation policy. The main questions addressed were:

- Innovativeness of the RPIA strategy, i.e. if the RPIA was innovative and applied policy approaches never tried in the region before (widening), new forms of cooperation, new actors involved, entering new sectors/fields or as a continuation of any previous innovation efforts (deepening);
- Innovative implementation practices, i.e. if the programme resulted in new implementation schemes, management innovation, innovative accompanying activities;
- Synergies with other EU measures, i.e. the extent to which the RPIA created operational and strategic synergies with other EU programmes or policy agendas.

2.2.3 Value added and Impact

This section looks at the specific impact, the RPIA had on regional development and innovation:

- Impact on mainstream ROP with the aim to investigate and explain the conditions and reasons for successful or failed mainstreaming;
- Identification of good practices and their transferability potential;
- Sustainability, i.e. the assessment of the impact beyond the life of the RPIA and the identification of prerequisites/reasons for strong/weak sustainability.
- Networks added value, i.e. the added value/externalities of the three innovative networks during the implementation of RPIA.

3. Research results

The assessment results are presented in the form of 24 individual RPIA analytical reports, and as a summative and cross-sectional synthesis including concrete policy lessons and options.

The results from individual assessments provide highly relevant, unique and interesting evidence, notably in the context of regional innovation programmes and experimentation. The project is closing in December 2010, thus at this stage already preliminary results can be demonstrated, for example:

The study evidences and explains the interdependencies between various governance structures, partnership quality, partnership mobilisation, experience with regional innovation policies, multilevel governance, etc. on the one hand, and the sustainability, strategy innovativeness, number of good practices, etc. on the other hand. Further, the study identifies a number of factors determining the extent to which the experimentation results were mainstreamed. The study also identifies a large number of innovative practices, as well as it explains failures in achievement of planned objectives.

Based on the summative and cross-sectional analysis, the paper concludes with elaboration of concrete policy lessons and options for post-2013 EU regional policy and Innovative Actions.

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