Innovating Regions
in Europe

RIS Methodological Guide

Stage 2

IRE Secretariat
February 2007

IRE Innovation network

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the Guide

A successful RIS[1] (Regional Innovation Strategy) initiative ultimately results in a positive impact in the region and not merely in a glossy brochure. This document intends to serve as a guide for practitioners in innovation policies helping them to achieve a positive impact in their region. It deals with the process of defining and implementing a regional innovation strategy as well as selected challenges and pitfall in the strategy formulation process. In particular, it aims at sharing experiences in the field of ensuring that analyses and plans actually form the basis for actions and are not considered a value in their own rights. Although, the main action takes place after the formal end of stage 2, dedication to action must be secured in stage (1 and) 2 already.

Moreover, the Methodological Guide for Stage 2 also tackles the issues of monitoring and evaluating RIS projects and regional innovation strategies. For a discussion of the first steps (particularly the analysis of the innovation demand and supply side) in a RIS initiative see the Stage 1 Methodological Guide.

The guide does not comprise best practice policies and measures which can be copied and pasted in another region. It intends to raise awareness for crucial aspects in the strategy formulation process, to provide ideas on what could be done and particularly *how* it could be done. Also, it attempts to stimulate mutual learning between regions that are dedicated to increase their competitiveness by improving their regional innovation system. The guide does not provide ideal solutions but clues on how to develop the adequate practice for your own region.

1.2. Outline of the Guide

The present guide is structured in eight main chapters as follows:

- **Introduction:** An introductory chapter describes the aim and structure of the Methodological Guide for Stage 2 of RIS projects;

- **Objectives of Stage 2:** This chapter gives a brief description of the main objectives of the Stage 2 of RIS projects;

- **Maintaining the consensus:** This chapter highlights the importance of communication in the design process of the regional innovation strategy;

- **From analyses to strategy development:** This chapter mainly focuses on the process of transforming and interpreting the analysis results from Stage 1 of the RIS in order to formulate a coherent regional strategy;

- **Designing the regional innovation strategy:** This chapter focuses on the design process of the regional innovation strategy including prioritising;

- **Action plan – key tool to implement the regional innovation strategy:** This chapter concerns the elaboration of an action plan for strategy implementation, definition and testing of pilot actions as well as the setting up of a monitoring system for the strategy;

- **Evaluation of the regional innovation strategy:** The main focus of this chapter lies on the definition of an effective system of evaluation and assessment of the regional innovation strategy and its impact on regional economy and its actors;

- **RIS project outlook:** Final chapter provides an outlook for RIS projects as a starting point for developing a regional innovation strategy as a process.

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[1] For the purpose of this guide, the acronym "RIS" will be used as a common acronym for the description of all RIS/RITTS/RIS-NAC/RTP projects which were implemented in the past programmes. RITTS stands for Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Strategies; RIS-NAC stands for Regional Innovation Strategies – Newly Associated Countries; RTP stands for Regional Technology Plan. The term "Regional Innovation Strategy" will be used in this guide when describing the strategy itself which lasts beyond the RIS project duration.

2. OBJECTIVES OF STAGE 2

Competition between regions has become more intense and more globalised. Regions – like enterprises - compete for resources and competencies like qualified labour, industrial investors, venture capitalists etc.. Overall, innovation success is seen as the highroad to competitiveness as it allows regions to simultaneously strive for potentially conflicting objectives, namely economic growth, environmental sustainability and social cohesion.

RIS initiatives are designed to help regions to improve in respect to the key success determinants of an innovation system. These include, but are not limited to a clear-cut vision/strategy shared by the main stakeholders, "branding" of the region, need orientation and transparency of the innovation system, intensity and professionalism of intra- and trans-regional interweavement, dedication of the system to action and success.

More specifically the second stage of a RIS project involves following activities:

- To design a regional innovation strategy including priorities recommendations and measures/projects based on the analysis;

- To elaborate an action plan for the implementation of the regional innovation strategy;

- To define, select and test the RIS pilot actions based on the action plan;

- To establish a monitoring system for the implementation of the regional innovation strategy;

- To formulate recommendations for the further development of the regional innovation strategy beyond the completion of the RIS project.

In addition to the above, this guide entails also chapter on establishment of the evaluation system for assessment of regional innovation strategies. However since setting up of an effective evaluation system is a time-consuming exercise, it is not foreseen that this task can be completed within the RIS projects duration. However RIS project managers should be aware of the fact that the elaboration of such system is very important in terms of providing feed back for further improvement of the regional innovation strategy. That is why they should be prepared for establishment of such system beyond the RIS project duration and if possible set the fist steps already within the RIS project.

2.1 Defining key objectives of the regional innovation strategy

The core issue of the final stage of a RIS project is to formulate a coherent regional innovation strategy and its objectives based on the findings of the analysis carried out in Stage 1. This involves the following steps:

- Summarising the findings of the innovation supply and demand analysis and their correct interpretation;
- Understanding the regional innovation landscape including what actions need to be taken in order to meet the needs of regional companies;
- Formulating the strategic priorities of the region with respect to innovation support and development.

While defining the objectives of the strategy, RIS project managers shall keep in mind that the regional innovation strategy is not designed for the purpose of implementation pilot actions in the framework of the RIS projects but rather a mid-term innovation strategy lasting beyond the completion of the RIS project. Thus the objectives of the strategy and the recommendations of priorities shall not be misunderstood as the operative objectives for the RIS project implementation, but are the strategic objectives of the region targeted at increasing of its competitiveness in the long term. Stage 2 of a RIS project is about providing support for strategic investment decisions of public and private stakeholders. It is **not** about the delivery of

pilot actions to a third party like the EU. Consequently, it is crucial to secure buy-in from key stakeholders from the very beginning.

2.2 Elaborating an Action Plan to ensure the implementation of the regional innovation strategy

The action plan shall be understood as a practical roadmap for the implementation of the regional innovation strategy and shall include the following issues:

- Definition of the priorities;
- Definition of the target groups;
- Definitions of the actions;
- Definition of the actors involved and their responsibilities in the process;
- Definition of the timeframes;
- Identification of the funding sources.

Since the internal as well as the external environment of a region is continuously changing, the action plan shall rather be understood as a vital working document anticipating the possible changes in the regional innovation system and the needs of its actors than a final document. Thus the issues defined in the action plan shall serve the decision makers as well as the policy makers as a basis for further adjustments and reviews.

2.3 Defining, selecting, testing and monitoring RIS pilot actions

Launching pilot actions already during Stage 2 can be a good way of testing ideas and showing concrete outcomes of the RIS project. This accounts also for pilot actions which can not be finalised before the end of the RIS project. The pilot actions allow for looking for the best solutions for the region and its actors.

Hence the pilot actions are an important part of the learning process in the development of a region's innovation system. The definition of possible pilot actions lies within the RIS project manager's team while the selection shall be the results of a discussion in the regional Steering Committee in order to make the actions legitimate. The process of testing the pilot actions testing is then coordinated by the RIS project manager and/or by the selected regional innovation intermediaries.

Furthermore, the implementation of the pilot actions shall be continuously monitored by the RIS management team. This allows for the first hand information and feedback from regional actors. For this purpose, the monitoring system for the strategy shall be established and put in place.

2.4 Establishment of an evaluation system for the regional innovation strategy

Apart from the monitoring which provides the management team with information about whether the milestones are met, activities are performed as planned and funds are used for the intended purposes; the relevant decision makers also need to have feedback on impacts of the measures put in place by the strategy and the effects on the region and its inhabitants.

Hence an evaluation system could be established in the framework of RIS project in order to provide lessons from the implementation of the regional innovation strategy. This allows for reviewing the strategy and its measures in order to determine whether they respond to the needs of regional actors and the regional economy. However, since this exercise is rather time-consuming, it is often not possible during RIS project itself and may be left for preparation after the RIS project is completed.

2.5 Formulating recommendations for the further development of the regional innovation strategy

Pilot actions provide the project management team with important first feedback on whether the regional innovation strategy really meets the expectations of the regional actors, in particular companies, and whether there is a broad dedication to change in the region. It is crucial to know

whether the needs of the companies have been recognised and the actions put in place are the right ones so that recommendations for the further development of the designed regional innovation strategy can be developed. This accounts for the planning of the next actions, possible reviews of the tools to achieve the objectives set, involvement of actors and the funding sources in order to increase the competitiveness of the region and the prosperity of its inhabitants.

It is essential to continuously invest into the further development, communication and implementation of the regional innovation strategy after the formal end of the RIS project. This means for instance that the regional innovation strategy is not only one more strategy for the regional stakeholders competing with strategies formulated by a variety of regional organisations and consortia, but instead a strategy that can make a difference if prepared in consensus with all relevant regional stakeholders.

3. MAINTAINING THE CONSENSUS

3.1 Objectives

Maintaining consensus among the key players throughout the whole RIS process is one of the keys to the success of the project. The RIS process takes a certain time before its first concrete results are visible: especially in the definition and analysis stages, there may be relatively little apparent activity which can reduce the initial enthusiasm and commitment of the actors for the project and undermine the consensus.

The relevant actors involved in both the preparation and analyses stages have also been addressed by the RIS management team throughout the whole process of the strategy development in order to give the process the necessary legitimacy and achieve a broad acceptance. The RIS managers need to be aware of the fact that an efficient strategy – as opposed to a long and general "wish list" – will probably not please everyone since strategic choices of priorities and actions are needed. Obviously, not all aspects of the strategy will satisfy all regional actors. However, this needs to be regarded as a natural part of each decision making process where choices on use of limited resources have to be made.

Moreover it is important to ensure that regional actors are willing to commit time, resources and efforts to implement the strategy and action plan agreed upon. It is therefore crucial not to hide different opinions of involved actors and enforce artificial compromises. An organisation's acceptance of a strategy paper has no value if the organisation does not base investment decisions upon it.

3.2 Process

The following examples from different RIS regions demonstrate the necessity of consensus building activities throughout the whole strategy development process and even beyond.

3.2.1 Accepting and sharing the results of analysis

In order to develop a regional innovation strategy that will be accepted by all relevant actors in the region, it is very important to involve them in the analysis and interpretation of the analysis (like in the previous stage which concerns the innovation landscape analysis itself). Since the analysis is usually a very complex process comprising different sets of analyses (supply, demand, technology trends, benchmarking etc.) and thus involving different actors, it is crucial to broadly communicate the analysis results once summarised in a synthesis document by the RIS coordinating team. Even more importantly, it has to be ensured that the relevant actors understand the analysis results. A consensus about the interpretation of analysis results is necessary as a basis for the formulation of strategic priorities and actions.

A "double rooting" can be extremely helpful, i.e. to organise reflection on the results of the analysis in sub-regions by carrying out working group meetings involving all important actors, following e.g. the model of the Steering Committee composition, and at the same time organise working groups on a sectoral basis. Using the combination of a geographic and sectoral approach may be useful in ensuring that all regional actors are aware of the results obtained by the analysis which they themselves contributed to, that they really agree with them and accept them as a basis for further strategy development.

3.2.2 Secure stakeholder buy-in to the regional innovation strategy

Also in the phase of strategy development all key actors need to be continuously involved. All important actors must feel that their voices are being heard when designing the strategy and its priorities; otherwise they will not identify with the outcomes which may lead to problems during the implementation phase in terms of lack of commitment and to the failure of the whole process in general.

3.2.3 Sharing the responsibility and leadership in strategy implementation

Once the strategy has been agreed upon, an action plan is to be designed specifying the measures, actions and tools how to achieve them. It would be advisable to have a specific leader of the process of strategy formulation in terms of a concrete institution as well as of concrete staff. It is important to choose an actor who has the power, ability and legitimacy to lead these two processes and also to make sure that the strategy is really implemented.

Apart from the leader, other regional institutions/actors and even specific persons can be appointed as being responsible for single actions and projects. Experience shows that such a division of responsibility ensures the overall acceptance and implementation of the defined strategy much more than if only one or two institutions or actors were responsible.

Sharing the responsibility for the RIS implementation in Wielkopolska

The implementation of the Wielkopolska regional innovation strategy foresaw an active participation of all relevant regional actors including public and support institutions as well as regional companies. The action plan included actions to be implemented in a short term (RIS pilot actions) as well as those planned in a medium term. During the process of the strategy development two series of meetings were held with regional stakeholders to ensure their involvement in the strategy shaping and setting and action plan. The first series were meetings of working groups (5 were functioning: 'Entrepreneurship and innovation needs of regional enterprises', 'Strengthening links of science and industry', 'Technology transfer services and financing', 'Enhancement of undeveloped subregions' and 'Interregional collaboration with partner regions') to reflect on the analysis reports prepared by experts, agree on main points of SWOT analysis and provide recommendations for the strategy document. At the same time the working groups members were asked to provide in simple form ideas for action plan and identify organisation that should be the leader of such an action. After a draft strategy was prepared a series of meetings were kept in many locations of the region to consult the strategy and elicit ideas for the action plan. The final action plan was developed with the involvement of the potential leaders and consultation with Steering Group. This way it were the regional actors who were actively proposing actions to be implemented often became leaders in the actual implementation process, being responsible for the coordination of the single actions.

3.2.4 Consensus building as a continuous process beyond the RIS project duration

Experience from different RIS projects has shown that consensus is not something that is reached only once but needs to be nurtured and maintained at every stage of the project itself and even beyond its completion. In this context, it is important to keep in mind that RIS shall not primarily be a project with a pre-defined termination but more importantly a process initiated by a project. Hence the successful strategy needs to be regarded as a living document being continuously further developed and adapted to the changing framework conditions in consensus with all key stakeholders.

Maintaining the consensus in RTP [2] Wales
In Wales, the actors who framed the development of the regional technology plan and who were involved in its implementation, were also asked to contribute to the reviewing of the strategy a couple of years after the RIS project had been completed and implemented. This was rightfully regarded as necessary in order to cope with changing issues and priorities and securing that the strategy remains relevant to the regional industry. By performing such a strategy check update, the initial consensus between stakeholders was further cultivated, strengthened and broadened to additional institutions.

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[2] RTP stands for Regional Technology Plan, which preceded RIS

In addition, the success of a RIS project is enhanced when the partnership driving the RIS process remains active also beyond the project completion. Many regions have used their RIS projects to establish a Steering Committee which was kept alive as a sustainable discussion panel for innovation issues in the region. Moreover, some regions have used the experience of their RIS project to redefine their decision-making process and institutional structures regarding the innovation support in the region.

> **Continuity of Innovation Supporting Structures in RIS South Transdanubia**
> *An important objective in RIS South Transdanubia was to create a regional institutional network for innovation. It was proposed to establish a Regional Innovation and Economic Development Committee, formed on the basis of the RIS Steering Committee. The Committee was responsible for proposing regional support programmes helping the innovation process, evaluating and deciding about applications for innovation projects, monitoring the innovation process in the region etc.. It was agreed that the Committee should be established as one of the permanent Committees of the South Transdanubian Regional Development Council.*

3.3 Results

Consensus building activities lead to and secure an agreement of all key regional stakeholders on the development of the regional innovation strategy throughout its different stages. This requires a continuous involvement of the regional stakeholders in all stages of strategy elaboration

The RIS management team has to be aware that the consensus building process is full of potential obstacles and conflicts. A pro-active approach towards these issues will minimise the risk of elaborating a strategy impossible to implement.

3.4 Check-list

□ Have you broadly communicated the results of the analysis on which you intend to build your strategy to the relevant regional stakeholders?

□ Have you considered the feedback from regional stakeholders on the analysis results?

□ Have you ensured integration and active participation of key stakeholders in the elaboration of the strategy?

□ Have you secured the responsibility and leadership of key stakeholders for actions related to the implementation of strategy?

□ Has the overall responsibility form the strategy been assigned to anyone? If yes, does this actor/institution have the necessary resources, abilities and legitimacy to lead and to drive the implementation process?

□ Have you envisaged and if yes specified how to maintain or expand the consensus building process after the RIS project completion?

4. FROM ANALYSIS TO STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Objectives

Once the analysis part of the RIS project has been completed, the challenge of the next exercise lies in transformation of the analysis results into a strategy. In order to do so, a preparatory step is needed to summarise and correctly interpret the results of the analysis. Thus, the strategy objectives and actions can be designed in such a way that the identified needs of the regional actors are met.

4.2 Process

The process from analysis to strategy development is a crucial part of the RIS projects. The summary of the analysis shall be done in such a way that it gives clear indications of what areas the strategy should be focused at and that it can provide ideas for actions. The summary should thus ideally be used for motivating people to get together and develop a good strategy.

At this stage, it is important to note that it is quite unlikely that the analysis will provide clear indications of exactly what actions are needed in the region. Instead, the analysis results will give indications that the region can use as a starting point for strategy discussions. It can also e.g. be used for validation whether the existing ideas of RIS project managers would be useful to be put in practice. Furthermore, the needs of the region must be analysed in order to allow the region to focus on issues that it can actually have an impact on (it is quite meaningless to make a strategy with priorities that can only be achieved e.g. on the national level or by market forces).

There are different ways how this can be approached. Much depends on regional context and framework conditions as well as time and resources available for the exercise.

4.2.1 SWOT analysis

As already mentioned in the Methodological Guide for Stage 1 in RIS projects, one of the methods to summarise the findings of the analysis stage can be a SWOT (Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities & Threats) analysis. This is a popular method used in many RIS projects to prepare the regional innovation strategy development. The SWOT analysis provides an overview of the regional strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats the region is facing or might face in the future.

In the context of RIS, the main contents of a SWOT analysis can be described as follows:

- A **strength** is an advantageous resource or capacity in the region to improve its innovation system and general competitiveness. The strategy and action plan should be built on strengths;

- A **weakness** is a limitation, fault or defect in the region that will keep it from improving its innovation system. Actions and a strategy should aim at eliminating weaknesses;

- An **opportunity** is a favourable situation in the region's environment. Actions and a strategy should aim to take advantage of the opportunities;

- A **threat** is an unfavourable situation in the region's environment that may potentially damage the strategy. Actions and strategy should aim at limiting the effects of the threats.

The implementation of the SWOT analysis involves following three main steps:

- **Scanning the regional environment** to detect major trends and influences likely to affect the region concerned. Different indicators can be used – socio-economic, demographic, geographic etc.. Indicators of regional disparities and benchmarks are particularly useful for revealing opportunities and threats.

- **Analysis of opportunities and threats** consists of listing those parameters of the environment which are not under control of regional actors and which will probably strongly influence the socio-economic development.

- **Analysis of strengths and weaknesses** involves an inventory of the factors which are at least partly under the control of regional actors and which may either promote or hinder development.

Once the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats have been identified, a graphic should be produced that gathers the possible strategies to adopt, as presented below:

	Strengths 1. 2. 3. etc.	*Weaknesses* 1. 2. 3. etc.
Opportunities	*"OS" actions* 1. 2. 3. etc.	*"OW" actions* 1. 2. 3. etc.
Threats	*"TS actions"* 1. 2. 3. etc.	*"TW actions"* 1. 2. 3. etc.

After having established the matrix with strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, the next task would be to analyse the opportunities and threats and see if it would be advisable:

- Actions to take advantage of Opportunities based on Strengths ("OS" Actions);
- Actions to respond to Threats based on Strengths ("TS" Actions);
- Actions to correct Weaknesses in order to take advantage of Opportunities ("OW" actions);
- Actions to correct Weaknesses in order to respond to Threats ("WR" Actions).

The best way how to do the analysis of every Opportunity would be the listing of all Strengths and then the Weaknesses and testing the viability of possible actions, one after another. After having confronted all Opportunities with all Strengths and Weaknesses, the same should be done with the Threats. At the end of the exercise, RIS project managers will obtain a list of possible actions (between five and ten) which form a basis for the development of the regional innovation strategy priorities and the action plan.

At this stage it is also important to mention that the SWOT analysis shall be carried out carefully avoiding very broad approaches. Regions in which much relevant data was not easily accessible often undertook a very demanding exercise to carry out a SWOT analysis trying to grasp all the data characterising their region. Hence in some cases, much of the information obtained was of little use for the purpose of the innovation strategy preparation and understanding the real needs of the regional actors. More focused SWOT analyses targeting specific innovation issues can thus be regarded as a tool bringing more useful results for the strategy development.

There are several ways how to approach the SWOT analysis. The following two examples describe how different RIS regions approach the SWOT analysis elaboration.

SWOT analysis approach in RIS South Central Bulgaria

In South Central Bulgaria a SWOT analysis of the regional innovation system was performed as a follow-up to the regional studies and analyses. The RIS management team took an innovative approach analysing the strengths and weakness of all three elements of regional innovation system - companies, research/technology providers and intermediaries – separately. Thus three analyses of strengths and weaknesses were conducted.

The external environment - opportunities and threats - were analysed for all 3 target groups together since certain threats and opportunities might be the same for all three target groups. The factors of external environment were then structured around 6 thematic groups – social, technological, economic, environmental, political and value-based factors.

Hereunder an abstract of the RIS South Bulgaria SWOT analysis:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
COMPANIES	**COMPANIES**
• The identified priority sectors are traditional for both the national and regional economy (mechanical engineering, textiles, wood processing etc.); the majority of companies are experienced and have traditions (human potential inclusive) in the corresponding production area; • The companies are well staffed with professionals who have completed university, college and specialised secondary education and have acquired good qualification and manufacturing experience; • Available production potential in terms of production capacity, buildings, staff, etc. for significant output increase; • Advantageous combination of price and quality of goods.	• Old and obsolete machinery, equipment and technologies in the priority sectors; • Poor or even missing infrastructure in some sectors (timber and wood-processing industry, agriculture); • Poor production infrastructure in the enterprises, in some of them even not constructed and if existing - poorly maintained; • Low wages that do not stimulate productivity and quality of manufacturing; • Absence of developed and implemented projects for energy-saving production processes;(mechanical engineering, wood processing); • Low level of product and process innovations;
R&D ORGANISATIONS	**R&D ORGANISATIONS**
• Significant research potential and good qualifications of researchers; • The research departments/institutes and universities in the region are specialised in sectors of primary importance to the development of regional priority sectors (agriculture, food and drinks industry, etc.) and have the potential to become centres of excellence at national level; • Best practice examples in the cooperation between research organisations and universities for the development and Implementation of research projects.	• The innovation activity of researchers is limited to the development stage only; • Insufficient expenditures on innovation activity. • Low expenditures on staff training in the RTOs. • Lack of investments in research infrastructure. • Low level of commercialisation of research results; inadequate knowledge about the mechanisms of market commercialisation of RTD results (for instance, underestimation of the role of marketing). • Small number of research results with IPR. • Underdeveloped cooperation between universities and RTOs in the process of development of innovative products.
INTERMEDIARIES	**INTERMEDIARIES**
• Traditions to work with the research and business communities. • All surveyed organisations operate as members of national networks. • Broad spectrum of services, i.e. training, business plan development, dissemination and provision of information, international cooperation, search for funding sources, etc., which in turn create opportunities for generation of demand within the companies. • Good awareness about the EU-supported programmes and participation in international and European programmes. • Good level of use of Information Technologies.	• Lack of understanding of the specifics of the intermediary organisations' role in general, as well as in the field of innovation. • Insufficient use of the potential of members of the intermediary organisations in the region, as well as insufficient use of national networks which these organisations represent. • Weak collaboration with the researchers from the region and hence, minor impact on the regional innovation policy. • Little support for SMEs in the field of legal protection of intellectual property rights (like patent protection). • Lack of statistical information and databases with relevant information on innovation.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
SOCIAL FACTORS	**SOCIAL FACTORS**
• *High education level of the population.* • *Absence of ethical conflicts.*	• *Emigration of high-quality work force.* • *Negative demographic trend.*
TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS	**TECHNOLOGICAL FACTORS**
• *Growing number of students in innovation-related disciplines.* • *Ecological agricultural production due to the obsolete technologies.*	• *No national register of research results.* • *Low interest in developing a research career.*
ECONOMIC FACTORS	**ECONOMIC FACTORS**
• *Macroeconomic stabilisation since 1997.* • *Specialisation of the different Bulgarian regions in specific sectors.*	• *Small domestic market due to low consumption rates.* • *Growing competition on the domestic market combined with low competitiveness of the Bulgarian industries.*
ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	**ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS**
• *Favourable conditions for development of different sectors like ecological and rural tourism.* • *The geographic location of the region provides opportunities for development of new economic activities, for instance eco-friendly manufacturing.*	• *Seismic region.* • *Dehydration and deforestation.*
POLITICAL FACTORS	**POLITICAL FACTORS**
• *The preparation for EU membership is a mobilising factor for improvements in the research, innovation and economic systems of the country.* • *New laws had been passed*	• *Insufficient level of innovation culture among the national and district administration in Bulgaria.* • *Lack of co-ordination between the institutions responsible for the national research, innovation and economic policies and the science and research community.*
VALUE-BASED FACTORS	**VALUE-BASED FACTORS**
• *Multi-cultural society;* • *Rich historical heritage that provides opportunity for economic activities and benefits;*	• *Large part of the population has no command of foreign languages.* • *Bulgarians are risk averse and would rather follow the traditional way of thinking than becoming entrepreneurially-oriented.*

SWOT analysis approach in RIS Opole

In the Polish region of Opole, the SWOT analysis was performed in two stages consisting of several workshops. Participants worked in three working groups: enterprises, education and R&D/business support institutions.

In the first stage each group formulated both strengths/weaknesses and opportunities and threats relevant to technology transfer and the innovation system. The outcome was merged, then compiled by an editorial team and presented in a SWOT table.

In the second stage the draft proposed by the editorial team was discussed and reviewed. After that, each participant evaluated the output individually. After summarizing and compiling the results obtained, priorities for an innovation strategy in Opole were identified.

The following table shows the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities identified by RIS Opole:

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• *extensive experience of R&D institutions, including knowledge of the SME environment and the capacity to solve technical and organisational problems in industry* • *experienced research staff* • *competitive cost of employment for foreign investors* • *a growing number of education and training institutions providing vocational education* • *increasing proportion of young people participating in European projects and programmes* • *laboratories specialised in the fields of chemistry, machine building, construction building and environmental engineering* • *use of new technologies at universities*	• *tedious administrative procedures and a lack of a friendly atmosphere for fostering business growth* • *an insufficient number of graduates establishing / opening their own businesses* • *lack of new, big investment projects in the region that would generate the creation of small partnering businesses* • *graduates not satisfactorily prepared for the needs of the labour market in terms of using modern technology* • *lack of development strategies in numerous businesses* • *poor access to information about available education capacity* • *low investment in R&D*
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• *use of European funds for supporting research* • *larger markets after the European enlargement* • *cooperation with European scientific centres – exchange of personnel and experience* • *application of experience gained through national and international cooperation* • *increasing cooperation between science and economy* • *high demand for innovative solutions in the region* • *substantial financial support from the EU for increasing the skills of managerial staff* • *more extensive use of research findings by regional businesses*	• *low competitiveness of domestic R&D institutions compared to foreign ones* • *unclear national science policy* • *SMEs not ready to compete on European markets after the accession* • *insufficient involvement of businesses in shaping the education policy* • *imperfect and unstable laws* • *poor match between the tertiary education curricula and the needs of labour market* • *insufficient involvement of local authorities in creating infrastructure for growing businesses* • *high emigration* • *complex and time-consuming procedures to obtain legal protection of innovative solutions*

4.2.2 Development of scenarios

In addition to conducting a SWOT analysis, it can be useful to develop scenarios which can form the basis for foresight and road mapping processes which allow drawing up a draft strategy and validating strategic directions.

Scenario techniques can constitute a bridging step between analysis and final drafting and respectively implementation of strategy. The possibility to explore different approaches may be important for regions which may have identified different paths to develop innovation policies in the course of their analyses.

However, experience shows that it is of a little use to explore too many different approaches, since too many scenarios are unlikely to be feasible and plausible.

Economic development scenarios in RIS Silesia

During the working groups meetings of the Regional Innovation Forum within the RIS Silesia project, the participants have drawn up two economic development scenarios for Silesia until 2013: one positive and one negative development scenario. These scenarios show different situations which can determine the economic development of the region in the future. They have been used to prepare the Regional Innovation Strategy for Silesia.

The two scenarios were formulated around following questions:

What will the regional economy development be like by 2013?
What will its main features be in 2013?

What will the development of regional SMEs be like by 2013?
What will its main features be in 2013?

What will the development of the research and development sector of the region be like by 2013?
What will its main features be in 2013?

What will the relations between the R&D sector, industry and business support institutions be like by 2013?

The two development scenarios have been used to dedicate resources, redefine priorities, market activities as a starting point for the regional innovation strategy formulation.

4.3 Results

The analysis process should result in a comprehensive summary document including the findings from all the analyses performed within Stage 1 of the project: e.g. innovation supply and demand analyses, analysis of technological trends, benchmarking exercise etc..

The summary document should provide the reader with a clear picture of the innovation landscape in the region. However, it shall not be understood solely as a summary of the results obtained by the different analyses but also include the interpretation of the results while identifying the potential fields of intervention for innovation policy makers. The summary may e.g. have a form of a 15 page summary report or of a two-page executive summary. The latter can at the same time be used as dissemination material for the regional stakeholders.

4.4 Check-list

☐ Have you summarised the results of the analyses in a comprehensive way?

☐ Has the summary been carried out by experienced and knowledgeable staff?

☐ Have you interpreted the results of the analyses in a way which allows the definition of adequate strategic priorities?

☐ Have you obtained a clear picture of the innovation landscape of your region including the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats?

☐ Have you validated the results of the analysis stage with the relevant regional stakeholders?

5. DESIGNING THE REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGY

5.1 Objectives

Once the results of the analysis stage have been summarised and interpreted, the actual innovation strategy shall be developed. The phase of strategy design can be regarded as the most important step within the RIS project: at this stage, the priorities for future development of the region in terms of innovation for the next 5-10 years are defined. It is therefore of utmost importance to allocate sufficient time and resources to the preparation of this task. Moreover, in order to develop a strategy acceptable for all key regional actors, the consultation process and consensus building are one of the priorities.

Ideally, the strategy shall be a document dealing with strategic issues, answering the question *what* shall be the main content, while the action plan is an operational document responding to the question *how* the regional innovation strategy will be implemented. It consists of concrete measures/actions/tools for the implementation of the priorities set in the strategy.

In some cases, the strategy may be the same document as the action plan. The next chapter will focus on the action plan.

In general terms, a good regional innovation strategy could be described as follows:

- It shall be clearly understandable for the main target groups – regional companies, R&D institutions, public authorities, NGOs, banks, etc;

- It shall rather concentrate on a few priorities than describe a broad and theoretic "wish list" of every regional stakeholder;

- It shall provide a vision and a clear roadmap to reach it;

- It shall be - if not unique - at least specific to the region;

- It shall be ambitious but realistic (e.g. pursuing it must not require substantially more resources than available);

- It shall be agree upon by the key regional stakeholders.

5.2 Process

A strategy is a plan reaching into the future in which activities and performances are defined that is necessary as to reach a targeted objective. The players participating in the project need to reach a consensus concerning the essential elements of the strategy if it is to fulfil its purpose as a common action orientation. The strategy process is to be understood as a process in which such a joint understanding of all participants will be developed, in particular regarding the following aspects:

- **From which situation do we start?**
- **Which priorities do we go for?**
- **How do we want to achieve the change?**

In particular, the process must enable the participants of a RIS project to correctly understand and describe the initial situation of a project, derive goals and objectives out of this situation and to develop a concept, which will lead to the fulfilment of the goals.

5.2.1 Elaboration of strategic priorities

A priority or a development goal describes the (positive) change in the future which is considered as desirable by the project target groups or which they pursue themselves. Thus,

the development goal shows the benefit that the target groups may expect from the project realisation. There must be an understandable connection between the identified problems and the situation described in the development goal.

For example; if the Stage 1 analyses yielded that companies consider existing innovation supporting services to be outdated or of low quality, a priority/development goal of the strategy may be to raise professionalism and improves service portfolios of innovation supporting intermediaries of the region.

Strategy Planning Matrix – a tool for strategy development

The strategy must outline how to achieve set priorities. This covers the coordination of the following issues:

- Various performances to be achieved - **results**;
- Respective **activities** necessary to achieve the results;
- Necessary **resources**.

A good strategy should also include statements on assumptions (i.e. possible risks) linked with such a proceeding as well as indicators according to which the fulfilment of the defined goals, results and assumptions can be recognized.

Results are understood as those products and services which are necessary for the achievement of the priorities (i.e. for the intended change in the behaviour of the performance receivers). Basically several alternative performance/result packages may be suitable which have to be checked in the framework of the planning.

Activities are the term for the respective single steps which have to be planned and carried out to achieve the single results. On the basis of the planned activities the need for *resources*, i.e. for project personnel, material goods and financial funds can be calculated.

Assumptions are external conditions which cannot be influenced by the project management but which are necessary as to work towards the priorities. The identification of assumptions serves to look into the environment of a project. An evaluation of the probability of their happening allows for describing possible risks which may threaten the success of the strategy and must, for this reason, be continuously observed.

Indicators describe how it can be determined that the set priorities are achieved, the goals accomplished and the assumptions happened and this makes the results, goals and assumption measurable and controllable. Stemming from a common understanding of all participants on the demand level and the success criteria they allow for a joint assessment of the realisation status of the strategy.

In the realisation of the described process different quality criteria have to be considered. Strategy development should always be made in a participative process in which all concerned by the identified problem situation as well as all other important players should be actively involved. This allows for deducting goals and project concepts from their points of view. Strategy development requires an iterative proceeding in which the insights gained during the project implementation are always re-integrated into the plan so that it can be continuously updated. Moreover, methodological openness is advisable, in particular since the actual selection often depends on the social or cultural content of the respective project. All important processes and decisions in the strategy development (and later implementation) are to be made transparen*t* so that all participants can understand them.

A special matrix - **Strategy Planning Matrix -** can be used to present the logical structure of a strategy. The basic form of the matrix consists of several columns and levels, leading to different fields. The presentation modes preferred by the respective institutions and organisations may vary in single aspects (e.g. regarding

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the number of columns and levels). The following figure illustrates a basic structure of the matrix.

Strategy	Indicators	Assumptions	Indicators of the assumptions
Main goal:			
Development goal:			
Project goal:			
Results:			
Activities:	Quantities and Costs		

The **first column** describes the strategy which consists of the goal hierarchy (main goal, development goal, project goal) and the action concept of the project (results, activities):

The main goal describes the superior strategic orientation or basic orientation of the project which is usually determined before the beginning of the undertaking and sets the frame in which activities can be planned. E.g. contributing to an innovation- and knowledge-based society.

The development goal describes which improvement of the target groups' situation is to be achieved as a consequence of the strategy/planned activities. E.g. better innovation-supporting services.

The project goal describes which changes in the behaviour of the project's performance receivers are to be achieved so that the intended benefit may occur for the target groups (direct impact of the project measures).

The results describe the products and services to be rendered by the project as to achieve the project goal.

The activities describe the single measures of the project required for achieving the results.

For the purpose of designing a regional innovation strategy it may only be necessary to consider the first two points.

The **second column** includes indicators for the development goal, the project goal and the results according to which the achievement of the goals and the results can be checked.

The **third column** lists assumptions (environment aspects) that are necessary so that the project goal and the development goal can be achieved.

The **fourth column** shows indicators for assumptions with which the development of the assumptions can be observed during the project process.

The necessary personnel, material and financial resources (termed as quantities and costs) are usually indicated in the second and third column on the level of the activities. Along with this, it is also broken down which of the project participants contributes which performance to the project.

Within the course of the project, the matrix forms the basis for the controllability of the respective project status and progress. Since the starting situation can change from which the project concept was deducted during the planning phase, the validity of the matrix must be regularly checked and modified where appropriate during the project implementation.

Hereunder some examples on how the selected regions designed their strategic priorities.

Definition of strategic priorities within RIS Cyprus

Within RIS Cyprus, five strategic priorities (in original text keystone policies) for the regional innovation strategy were defined. Then the operative actions/measures were elaborated to address the priorities. Hereunder a description of the five priorities:

Priority 1: Enforcement of endogenous capabilities of companies to develop innovative activities

This priority resulted from e.g. recognising low levels of expenditure for R&D, human resources, specialisation and insufficient cooperation of researchers with regional companies, etc.

Priority 2: Bridging the gap between entrepreneurs and academia/research communities – enforcement of an innovation support system.

The formulation of this priority was related to the need to create communication channels and mechanisms between academia and the business sector due to the absence of structured relations between the two "worlds". Also, there is a limited supply of innovation and technology in the sectors where a great demand was recognised.

Priority 3: Improving human resources

This priority derived from the fact that the companies mainly link their technological input with the purchase of technological equipment and not in human resources. The latter shall hence be exploited as one the regional assets.

Priority 4: Development of innovation financing mechanisms

This priority identified a need for development of appropriated financial means for improvement of innovation in the region since the existing mechanisms do not address the identified needs.

Priority 5: Innovation culture creation and awareness on R&D issues

The above priority tackles the lack of the awareness on the innovation in the region which is one of the main pre-conditions for development of a coherent approach towards innovation.

Another issue around the strategy development concerns the involvement of regional stakeholders in the process. The way how and which strategic priorities are defined depends on the nature of actors involved in the whole process. This is generally closely linked to specific regional/national culture and framework conditions. In some regions/countries, the approach is still rather top-down where the public authorities are at the core of the process. In other regions/countries, the business community is traditionally actively involved in framing of public policies. Hence, how the strategy will look like at the end of the process and which priorities will be chosen depends on the type of actors.

Business champions approach in RIS Yorkshire and Humber

The approach towards the innovation strategy definition and development adopted by the RIS Yorkshire and Humber project built upon the specific UK culture recognising the influential role of the business champions. The idea behind was to actively involve the region's business community to form business led sector networks which were at

the core of the RIS strategy development process. The champions – representatives of the business sectors – were asked to develop sector strategies and action plans to improve the competitiveness of their sector in short as well as in the long term by more effective use of public funds. This sectoral approach allowed for definition of the activities and challenges businesses face rather than traditional approach of geographic location or general issues such as financing, cooperation, technology transfer etc.

As a result of this approach, RIS Yorkshire and Humber targeted at developing not a single innovation strategy but rather a set of 15 strategies for key business sectors in the region. Hereunder examples of two selected sectoral strategies and their priorities:

Sector	Priority	Description
Engineering, Materials & Manufacturing	*Recruitment and Skills*	*Need to improve skills levels and training*
	Funding	*Providing funds for manufacturing companies*
	Technology Take Up	*Support of companies to adopt IT and new technology equipment and process without time lag*
	Research and Development	*Increasing of R&D level in the industry*
	Supply Chain	*Challenge of on-line procurement in the supply chain and web-based trading*
	Culture	*Support of cultural change to address low productivity levels compared to US and Europe*
Freight Industries	*Recruitment and Skills*	*Need to improve skills levels and training*
	Environmental Legislation	*Considering impact of environmental legislation upon costs to industry and therefore competitiveness*
	Infrastructure and Multi Modal Opportunities	*Awareness raising of the freight industry and transport users on use of specific grants to move freight from roads to other modes*

5.2.2 Public discussion of defined priorities and final validation of the strategy document

Another important issue within the regional innovation strategy definition is public discussion of defined priorities and measures/actions once it has been elaborated. Some popular tools of initiating a broad public discussion on the strategy draft proposal are presentations of the strategy on the website or discussions in workshops and conferences with the key regional stakeholders. This process is crucial for achieving an acceptance of the strategy by regional community. If successfully completed, it provides for good basic conditions for a smooth implementation in the future.

Following the public discussion of the strategy, the final validation of the document is made. Different public actors might be involved in this task: in a first step, the validation of the strategy is made by the RIS project Steering Committee which is the strategic body for the RIS project

itself. Then, and even more importantly, the existing regional decision making bodies (executive and legislative bodies) like regional parliaments and regional governments, in an ideal case, approve the strategy and publish a strategic innovation document for the region. The latter may be done e.g. by integration into the existing regional development plans.

Workshops to define a strategy for RITTS Rheinland-Pfalz

Individual topics identified by the SWOT analysis were analysed in detail during five thematic workshops with various public and private actors. The workshops generated a basic formulation of strategy priorities which were suggested to the Steering Committee. After that, the Steering Committee ranked the possible strategic priorities and selected the final priorities. The ranking was made by each individual member of the Steering Committee. In the later course, implementation (action) plans were elaborated for each single thematic priority of the strategy.

Broad public consultation of the strategy within RIS Silesia

The RIS Silesia innovation strategy was prepared with broad consensus of all relevant regional actors. Numerous representatives of large companies, SMEs, local governments, business support organisations and R&D institutions participated in the Regional Innovation Forum meetings and workshops discussing the outcomes of the SWOT analyses and preparing development scenarios. A month later again, the representatives from politics, economy and research sector supported the preparation of operational solutions and fields of actions for the strategy. Then the draft strategy was presented in a downloadable version on the RIS project website. The RIS project coordinators team received e-mails and phone calls from regional stakeholders providing feedback to the analysis. The results of public consultation process built a basis for the decision of the Steering Committee which recommended the selected priorities to the Regional Board of Silesia Voivodeship. The final version of the Regional Innovation Strategy document was then approved by the regional parliament of Silesia Voivodeship.

5.3 Results

This chapter shows different approaches to the elaboration and development of the strategy, formulation of priorities and measures as well as to the importance of the consensual approach. Hence, the most important principles on how to prepare a successful innovation strategy can be summarised as follows:

- Setting realistic objectives, priorities and measures taking the regional framework conditions, availability of resources (funds and staff) as well as willingness and competencies of all regional actors into account. Moreover, the strategic objectives shall also guide and motivate the work of the regional stakeholders;

- Based on a broad consensus and discussed with at least the most important regional stakeholders in order to reach the overall acceptance within the region;

- Take existing documents and documents under preparation into consideration which relate to the innovation support in the region – e.g. regional/national planning documents and economic development plans, Structural Funds documents e.g. Regional Operation Programmes, etc..

  Strategies fulfilling the above mentioned criteria have a fair chance to be implemented and even being implemented with positive impact.

5.4 Check-list

□ Do the priorities defined in your strategy reflect the needs of the region and its stakeholders?

□ Is the strategy realistic?

□ Have you consulted the strategy with the key stakeholders in your region and involved their views into the strategy?

□ Have you reached a broad consensus on the strategic orientation of the regional innovation strategy?

□ Have you considered other existing strategic documents or documents under preparation regional/national/EU which would/could affect the strategy?

□ Have you secured the verification of the strategy by relevant regional decision makers /bodies?

6. ACTION PLAN – KEY TOOL FOR IMPLEMENTING THE REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGY

6.1 Objectives

The action plan, as the main document guiding the implementation of the strategic priorities, is the core topic of this chapter. The main objective of the action plan is to break down the strategic objectives into concrete actions. The RIS projects need to think about how to reach their strategic objectives. This way of thinking is also crucial when formulating the strategic objectives, in order to make sure that they do not become too vague or impossible to reach.

Moreover, this chapter deals also with the preparation and testing of the RIS pilot actions as well as with the establishment and putting in place of the RIS monitoring system. The objectives of the present chapter can be summarised as follows:

- Elaboration of an action plan in which the priorities and measures set in the strategy are worked out in detail;

- Performing a testing exercise which concerns selected RIS pilot actions;

- Establishing a monitoring system which concerns the monitoring of the RIS project including the pilot actions.

6.2 Process

6.2.1 Planning the implementation of the regional innovation strategy – Action Plan

The Action Plan can be described as a basic operational document for the implementation of the regional innovation strategy. It shall thus be seen as a roadmap for all those actors involved in the implementation process.

The Strategy Action Plan shall comprise at least the following issues:

- Definition of concrete actions/measures and projects to achieve the strategy priorities;

- Definition of timeframes for the implementation of single actions/measures and projects (short-term, medium-term, long-term);

- Description of competencies and responsibilities of single regional actors for the implementation of concrete actions/measures and projects;

- Identification of funding sources for concrete actions/measures and projects.

Action plan in RIS Lower Austria

The regional innovation strategy of RIS Lower Austria included several priority recommendations:

- *Opening up the innovation potentials of Lower Austrian technology providers*
- *Setting up an innovation-supporting network*
- *Improving the transparency and access to the public innovation-supporting offer*
- *Introduction of innovation coaches*
- *Stimulating and intensifying cooperation among companies*
- *Re-orientation of support instruments of the region to finance innovation projects*
- *Enhancing the internationalisation activities of the Lower Austrian companies*

- *Stimulating innovation-oriented business foundations*

These priorities provided a basis for the definition of five core priorities which have been the basis of the regional innovation system of Lower Austria for almost 10 years. Within the priorities, concrete actions were proposed accompanied by the description of roles and responsibilities of the single actors.

Hereunder is an abstract of the actions and responsibilities proposed for the core priorities as formulated in the RIS Lower Austria action plan:

Example Core priority	Why?	Targets to be achieved	Actions and responsible actors
Positioning Lower Austria as a Technology Location	*Currently Lower Austria does not posses the image of a technology location because of diffuse profile of technological competence on the companies' as well as the providers' side.* *Due to the planned launch of the prestigious project Med Astron, favourable conditions for positioning of Lower Austria as technology location are given.*	*Setting up one or two competence centres* *Necessary condition is participation of leading companies in the region* *Ensure that competence centres will become problem solvers for companies*	*Action 1: Elaboration of a study in which ideas and potentials to strengthen the technological competence fields are systematically gathered and evaluated* *Actor responsible: external marketing consultancy together with the University of Economics in Vienna* *Action 2: Setting up specific university courses to increase of the qualification level of the employees of regional companies* *Actor responsible: Fachhoschule Wiener Neustadt*
Establishment of a Lower Austrian Innovation Supporting Network	*Lack of transparency in regarding the existing offer of innovation supporting institutions is often a barrier for companies. This shows a need for better coordination among intermediaries in Lower Austria as well as an increase of transparency regarding their services*	*Establishment and consolidation of innovation supporting network in Lower Austria*	*Action 1: Introduction of innovation coaches* *Actor responsible: Office of Lower Austrian Government and external consultants* *Action 2: Systematic and continuous survey of company needs for innovation supporting services* *Actor responsible: Office of Lower Austrian Government and external consultants* *Action 3: Setting up a communication platform for technology providers and intermediaries* *Actor responsible: Austrian research Centre Seibersdorf and Landesakademie* *Action 4: Creating an Innovation Information System in Lower Austria (INFINÖ)* *Actor responsible: Office of Lower Austrian Government*

RITTS London: identification of an action plan

Within the framework of RITTS London a series of strategic actions have been agreed upon and systematised along three thematic groups. These groups of strategic actions thematic groups were defined as follows:

Four Strategic Regional Actions:

Actions which focus on regional economic infrastructure and creating of culture of innovation within business environment:

- *Regional Identity, Awareness and Branding,*
- *Improving of Business Environment – Transport, Communications, Premises and built Environment,*
- *Sharing Experience and Good Practice,*
- *Promoting and Embedding Innovation Culture in SMEs*

Seven Specific Regional Actions:

Actions which impact directly on business competitiveness, targeting key areas of innovation, original and transferable technology and financial, growth and training development needs:

- *Empowerment of SMEs,*
- *Access to sources of Innovation Development and Venture Capital,*
- *Innovation Concepts and Process,*
- *Clusters, Value Chains and Networks,*
- *Regional Targeting for Business Skills Training,*
- *Bridging the Gap between Regional Centres of Excellence and SMEs,*
- *E-business solutions for SMEs*

Five Specific Inter-regional Actions:

Actions to raise the regional international profile and interact with other regions of the RITTS/RIS network in Europe.

Development of projects within RITTS Lüneburg

In the course of the RITTS Lüneburg project, around 50 project suggestions and ideas for the regional innovation strategy were made. To secure the widest possible and meaningful consensus on the strategy goals and measures, a Project Forum was held. Here all the ideas were presented to the participants covering the public as well private sectors and jointly discussed and assessed.

The ideas and project assessment procedure was based on the following principles:

Is the project in accordance with strategic RIS objectives?

Is there a need for the project in the area that is "worth subsidising"?

Does the project have impact on or at least act as a model for the whole region?

Does the project deal with existing or future-oriented potential or competence?

Does the project help to create jobs or at least safeguard them?

Is the project capable of achieving consensus?

Are the steps to achieving projects realistic; is there an organisation that accepts responsibility for implementation of the project?

Does the project help the region to sharpen its profile and to improve its image?

With help of the above criteria/principles, the priorities were selected and merged into three groups:

- *RITTS priority projects – projects to be implemented in a short term having at the same time a significant impact*

- *RITTS projects in the 1st category – projects that should strengthen and further develop the priority projects*

- *RITTS projects in the 2nd category – projects which still require some preparation before starting the implementation*

Another option on how to develop a RIS action plan is taking the time aspect into account. Some regions found it useful to implement the innovation strategy with several action plans as e.g. in RIS South Central Bulgaria.

Annual action plans in RIS South Central Bulgaria

The regional innovation strategy for South Central Bulgaria was designed for 5 years (2004-2009). The strategy will be implemented with annual regional innovation plans in line with the following procedures:

- *First, the Annual regional innovation plans are harmonised with district and municipal development plans;*
- *Second, the Annual regional innovation plans are submitted to the Regional Development Council for approval;*
- *Finally, upon the approval by the Regional Development Council, the respective Annual regional innovation plan becomes an integral part of the Regional development plan thus providing for the funds for its implementation.*

6.2.2 Process of testing – RIS Pilot Actions

The regional innovation strategy constitutes the basis for actions far beyond the formal end of a RIS project. However, if feasible it should be attempted to run pilot actions within the framework of the RIS project already, as this serves an important validation purpose.

The added value of the pilot actions has been recognised by many of the regions that implemented RIS projects. Although the funds allocated to the pilot projects are normally rather limited, it was possible to achieve very good results in many regions. The pilot actions enabled them to fund selected projects thus establishing a valuable learning process often leading to incorporation of such projects into mainstream programmes.

To sum up, the RIS pilot projects can be used in different ways[3]:

- As flagship projects demonstrating the effectiveness of a RIS project as a tool to illustrate the main priorities and actions set in the strategy;
- As "test bed" for larger projects/programmes in form of guides, preparatory or feasibility studies;

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[3] Methodological Guide Stage 2; PARTNER network; October 2003.

- As a basis for existing regional programmes (e.g. Structural Funds operational programmes) if they prove successful.

Pilot actions established within RIS Wielkopolska

The Wielkopolska pilot actions have been proposed by their potential executors – specific regional intermediaries – who showed also willingness to implement them in a short term (few months time). Although the proposed pilot actions did not refer to all the problems identified in the analysis, they covered a great part of the strategic objectives/priorities defined in the regional innovation strategy. The table below shows the examples of Wielkopolska pilot actions linked to one or more objectives/priorities of the strategy.

Number of Objective/Priority	*Pilot action*	*Description*
3.1. Boosting entrepreneurial thinking in R&D sector	*Business plan competition*	*Targeted at R&D staff, students and graduates, aiming at identification of promising business ideas for start-up creation. Pilot action foreseen to fund training as well as the management support for the selected company founders*
2.1 Overcoming mental stumbling blocks to innovation and cooperation *1.2 Supporting less developed areas of Wielkopolska region via innovation*	*Cooperation Forum*	*Action supporting the promotion of local cooperation forums which should be established in every county*
1.3 Creating conditions and instruments to implement the regional innovation strategy *4.2 Improving the quality of services and adjusting the offer of intermediaries to companies' needs* *4.3 Improving structure and availability of innovation supporting services*	*Establishment of the Wielkopolska Innovation Network*	*Establishment of a network with sub-regional structure as a basis for cooperation among innovation supporting institutions operating in the region*
2.2 Improving the skills of companies staff	*Interactive workshops to strengthen managerial skills and skills in strategic thinking in companies*	*Experienced consultants for a selected group of companies. In order to gain the most motivate participants, the workshops will be partially chargeable.*
2.4 Development of inter-regional cooperation among companies	*Organisation of Interregional Cooperation Forum*	*A seminar alongside business meetings of companies from selected industries of three regions – apart from Wielkopolska also Brandenburg and Marche region.*
3.1. Boosting entrepreneurial thinking in the R&D sector *3.2 Setting structures and regulations in the R&D sector facilitating cooperation between science and economy* *4.1 Developing business environment institutions supporting innovation*	*Centre of Advanced Technologies*	*Establishment of the Centre of Advanced Technologies as a consortium of research units and companies*

The effect of RIS pilot actions can be strengthened when these are linked to other programmes like EU structural funds programmes or regional/national mainstream funding programmes and

initiatives. This enables the effective use of limited resources in the region and thus reaching necessary synergies.

When developing pilot actions, an innovative approach shall be applied that means either identification of projects demonstrating new ways of doing things or alternatively developing completely new ideas.

The success factors of pilot actions can be in general terms summarised as follows[4]:

- Each pilot action requires clear responsibilities and a project leader;
- The project leader has to be a person with ability to motivate other project/action partners;
- The single actors involved in pilot action implementation should focus on their core competencies;
- Intensive and early integration of regional companies facilitates the need-orientation and increases the chances for success.

6.2.3 Monitoring system

"Monitoring is a process of providing management information through the life of a programme. It comprises systems for obtaining signals as to whether activities are taking place according to schedule, if milestones are being met, whether funds are being used for the intended purposes, and the like. The focus tends to be on inputs and activities, and less on outputs and outcomes, though immediate outputs like project reports and other deliverables are encompassed."[5] Monitoring is usually undertaken by the programme/project management team.

There is a difference between monitoring and the evaluation process. In contrast to monitoring, the objective of evaluation is to seek lessons to be learnt from the implementation of a certain programme and is often performed by external independent party. However, monitoring can also be regarded as an important part of the evaluation exercise. If the project was monitored while it progressed, the evaluators do not need to invest time in collecting of the relevant data (e.g. on programme inputs such as allocated resources per organisation; or programme outputs such as number of registered patents, etc). The better monitoring system is designed at the beginning of the project/programme, the easier it is to evaluate.

The monitoring exercise concerns monitoring of the whole programme/project including monitoring of the pilot actions. The following aspects need to be covered by monitoring:

- Monitoring of RIS project activities and projects (operational goals);
- Monitoring of fulfilment of milestones;
- Definition of monitoring indicators (input and certain output indicators);
- Definition of monitoring methodology;
- Definition of team responsible for monitoring.

The establishment of an effective monitoring system is an important issue in RIS projects. Without such a system, the project management team would lack the essential feedback on the implementation success of activities and projects.

In this context, appropriate monitoring indicators need to be defined. It is advisable to start determining indicators already when planning the activities, measures and projects defined in the strategy.

In the following, some of the examples of monitoring indicators defined for different RIS/RITTS projects are described. The *RITTS Asturias* example shows operational monitoring indicators directly linked to concrete actions, which can be measured relatively easy and to a quite high extent influenced by the project management.

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[4] RIS Lower Austria Final Report, Page 28.
[5] Smart Innovation: A Practical Guide to Evaluating Innovation Programmes; Page 58; European Commission, DG Enterprise and Industry, January 2006.

Monitoring indicators of RITTS Asturias

Within the RITTS Asturias project, the monitoring indicators to evaluate the project were defined for each of the proposed actions:

Key priority	Proposed actions	Monitoring indicators
Business R&D +I	Supporting the development of new high value-added products and processes	- Number of project proposals received and analysed - Numbers of projects approved
	Support of recruitment of innovation-related advanced services	- Number of applications for aid - Number of realised projects - Number of contracts with companies
	Introduction of new technologies in traditional sectors	- Number of subsidised actions - Sectors covered - Number of beneficiary companies - Technologies introduced
Business cooperation	Creation of sector clusters	- Number of clusters created - Number of technology committee created - Number of cooperation projects on R&D+I between companies in each cluster
	Formalisation of protocols with tractor firms	- Number of protocols signed between Government of the Principality and tractor firms in the region - Number of cooperation actions - Number of cooperation actions per type of support actions - Amount of financing mobilised
Creation of technology-based firms	Integral support for the creation of technology-based firms	- Number of companies supported in first, second and third phase - Number of companies created - Amount of start-up funds assigned - Number of jobs created - Technological areas developed - Degree of diversification in the activity with respect to the regions production sector as a whole

	Campaign on Innovation in Asturias	*- Number of actions developed* *- Number of actions per target groups*
Innovative culture	*Diffusion and dissemination of actions oriented to Asturian business*	*- Number of diffusion actions* *- Number of companies participating* *- Efficiency rates for each type of diffusion (depending on costs and firms participating)* *- Qualitative evaluation of each action* *- Number if appearances in media*
Training for innovation	*Training for businessmen and entrepreneurs*	*- Number of specific courses and organised seminars* *- Number of participants in courses* *- Number of grants awarded*
	Job training designed to anticipate innovation-related training needs	*- Number of specific courses and organised seminars* *- Number of participants in courses*
Technology transfer	*Valuation of R&D generated by Science, Technology & Innovation*	*- Number of subsidised actions* *- Number of demonstrations* *- Number of pilot projects* *- Number of companies benefiting from measures*
	Promotion of technology transfer in Asturias	*- Number of beneficiary companies* *- Number of technology offers introduced from the Principality* *- Number of demands received form the Principality* *- Degree of coverage of demand and offer through service*

The **RIS Silesia** example, on the other hand, shows strategic objectives formulated in concrete terms. The region has, however, a little or no influence on their fulfilment. These indicators can only be measured through an evaluation, which might have difficulties to show the casual links with the strategy.

Development of monitoring criteria within RIS Silesia

Within the RIS Silesia project, the following criteria ware selected to monitor the regional innovation strategy for the period of 2003-2013:

1   Regional Innovation System based upon networks between business support institutions, R&D sector, local governments and companies ready by 2005

10%   increase in registered patents each year from 2008 on

100   new innovative SMEs founded based upon technologies from R&D institutes and higher education by 2008

1 000   SMEs engaged in about 15 local and regional clusters by 2008

> *10 000   students per year involved in innovation and entrepreneurship promoting activities from 2005 onwards*
>
> *100 000   persons employed in medium-high and high technology sectors from 2013 on*

6.3 Results

As the result of the RIS project implementation, the following elements shall be defined and effectively put in place:

- Innovation Strategy Action plan
- RIS Monitoring System
- RIS pilot actions

The RIS action plans shall define the implementation procedures for the strategy, assign tasks to relevant regional actors, and establish funding possibilities for strategy priorities and actions. It shall therefore secure the commitment of regional players - most importantly the companies – and their active participation in the strategy implementation process.

The RIS monitoring system shall if possible define the procedures, methodology and indicators to monitor the fulfilment of tasks in the RIS projects and strategy implementation process, the punctual delivery of activities in line with the budget and meeting of milestones defined in the action plan. The results of monitoring shall later serve as basic data for the strategy evaluation.

RIS pilot actions shall in a short term test the priorities and measures defined in the strategy in form of projects. These may serve e.g. as preparatory steps for larger projects, as flagship projects demonstrating the operability of RIS and/or as basis for existing programmes. The pilot actions shall test new approaches in the region and secure the commitment of regional actors.

6.4 Check-list

☐ Have you defined responsible organisations/persons for the implementation of single measures/actions/projects?

☐ Have you defined the timeframes for the implementation of the action plan and its single measures/actions (e.g. long-term, mid-term, short-term)?

☐ Have you tested the strategy with help of the pilot actions in the framework of the RIS project?

☐ Have you consulted the action plan and its measures as well as other relevant issues concerning the implementation procedures with the relevant stakeholders and obtained their approval?

☐ Have you defined appropriate monitoring indicators and procedures to be able to follow the implementation of pilot actions and the strategy?

☐ Have you ensured the relevant/right institution that will be responsible for the monitoring of the strategy implementation process?

☐ Have you disseminated the results of the strategy planning and implementation process towards the broad public?

7. EVALUATION OF REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGY

7.1 Objectives

As already referred to in the previous chapter, there is a difference between monitoring and evaluation even though sometimes these terms are being used in the same context. While the monitoring serves the purpose of checking if the activities within the RIS project are running in line with the initial objectives, time schedule and budget, evaluation intends to analysis the impact of the regional innovation strategy even beyond the end of the RIS project.

Evaluation continues to be a critical issue for the success of regional innovation policies. Evaluation results can provide policy makers with the data they need to make their decisions thus they do not have to rely on uncertain information. Evaluation as a tool is also important since different policy makers are competing for a limited share of public money.

Moreover, the innovation supporting programmes work in an ever changing environment. The innovation process encompasses a variety of different tools, policies and programmes that must constantly be adapted to new framework conditions. That is why it is a constant learning process to act effectively and meet new challenges. Hence the evaluation of different policy interventions in the field of innovation has become an important tool to measure the success of the policy achievements and results.

Objectives	Objectives of Evaluation		
Programme Aims	Immediate Impacts	Medium-Term Impacts	Longer-Term Consequences
Increase awareness of a set of new technologies	Attending meetings, uptake of literature, hits on websites	Adoption of technologies	Improved business performance; continuing awareness and adoption of related technologies
Improve the skill basis of a set of industries	Training sessions, staff exchanges	Improved technical competencies of staff, increase effectiveness of in-house R&D	Improved innovation performance, increased technological absorptive capacity, greater technical awareness
Increase science-industry links	Student placements, intensified academic-industry dialogue	Introduction of new knowledge and skills	Improved skill, technical competence and knowledge base
Stimulate the start-up of new technology-based companies	Finance and information for future entrepreneurs	Creation of new high-tech companies	Long-term growth and sustained development of new high-tech industrial sectors

Table: Examples of Innovation Programmes and Innovation Issues [6]

The objectives listed in the table show synergies between monitoring and evaluation. As already mentioned in chapter 6 of this guide, monitoring shall deliver certain data for evaluation. Hence the objectives of evaluation cover also monitoring presented in the table as "immediate impacts". The medium-term impacts and long-term consequences can be already directly linked to actual evaluation targeting the assessment of impact of the regional innovation strategy implementation over a longer period of time.

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[6] Examples of Innovation Programmes and Associated Innovation Issues. Source: Smart Innovation: A Practical Guide to Evaluating Innovation Programmes, Page 33.

It is important to state at his stage that the preparation of the methodology to evaluate a regional innovation strategy is a demanding and time-consuming process. There might not be the time for the elaboration of both monitoring and evaluation methodologies during the term of the RIS project.

7.2 Process

In order to be able to deliver relevant outcomes, the evaluation exercise shall be well structured and performed on a regular basis. It is important to define the methodology of data collection and processing. This may be done via processing statistical data, via regular surveys and/or interviews with regional actors.

While statistical data mostly provide information on quantitative aspects of innovation-related issues, surveys and interviews enable to access more qualitative data.

When selecting the appropriate evaluation method/s, also other planned evaluation exercises in the region that might be carried out at the same time should be taken into consideration. This is mainly important when choosing the survey method which is normally a time-consuming process for the actors involved, especially for companies. If there are similar surveys running in parallel in the region carried out by different institutions, this may lead to a general reluctance of surveyed companies to cooperate. Thus, the information obtained from a questionnaire might be incomplete or even incorrect.

Another important aspect of evaluation concerns the selection of the right institution carrying out the evaluation exercise. In contrast to monitoring which normally lies with the project management team (regional public authority, regional development agency, university etc), it is advisable to delegate the evaluation to an independent institution / external expert who is able to assess the results, impacts and effects of the strategy independently and in a realistic way.

Evaluations shall be performed on a regular basis – every 3-5 years depending on regional framework conditions and needs. In order to be able to compare the data along time and hence obtain results relevant for the further development of the strategy, it is important to standardise evaluation methods. When e.g. executing surveys, the questions shall be structured around the same topics in order to enable comparisons.

> *Development of an evaluation methodology and indicators within RIS South Central Bulgaria*
>
> *Within RIS South Central Bulgaria, a set of indicators to assess the innovative performance of companies in the region was developed. These indicators shall enable a benchmarking of South Central Bulgaria region with other Bulgarian regions as well with the national economy. The indicators were categorised in four thematic groups; some of the examples are mentioned in the table below.*

Definition of evaluation tool	Definition of indicator groups	Examples of selected evaluation indicators
Indicators on innovative performance of companies in the region	*Human resources*	*Population with tertiary education (% of 25-64 years age class)*
		Participation in life-long learning (% of 25-64 years age class)
	Knowledge creation	*Public R&D expenditures (5 of GDP)*
		Business expenditures on R&D (% of GDP)
	Transmission and dissemination of knowledge	*Share of innovative enterprises (% of all manufacturing enterprises)*
		Innovation expenditures (% of turnover in services)
		Company- university cooperation (% of companies having joint projects with R&D sector)
	Innovation finance, output and markets	*Availability of long-term financing (share of long-term loans/ > 3 years in maturity/ in regional banks´ portfolios)*
		Technology sales (royalties and licensing in % of total company turnover)

A data collection method was agreed upon as well as two data sources were identified:

- *Statistical data from the National Statistical Institute (NSI) – the NSI shall provide information on innovation-related data based on the Community Innovation Survey on a three year basis. The relevant information will thus allow for the evaluation of retinal performance, benchmark it with other Europeans regions and possibly review and update the regional innovation strategy.*

- *Data obtained by survey – if additional information is needed, a separate regional survey will be performed focusing on specific innovation issues concerning the RIS Strategy rather than on general innovation data.*

7.3 Results

The evaluation methodology for regional innovation strategies shall consider the following elements:
- Establishment of evaluation tool/s (e.g. statistical data, survey, interviews on phone or in person)

- Selection of appropriate indicators and data to be collected and evaluated

- Appointment of the evaluation team

- Decision on the frequency of evaluations

7.4 Check-list

☐ Have you ensured the definition of relevant methodologies and indicators to evaluate the impact of your regional innovation strategy on the region and its actors?

☐ Have you decided upon the frequency of the evaluation exercise?

☐ Have you considered an independent organisation/body that will be responsible for the evaluation of the strategy?

8. OUTLOOK ON RIS PROJECTS

Strong entrepreneurial spirit will be vital in the future knowledge-based economy of Europe. This can not be achieved by providing support and funding alone, but needs a positive political climate also.

Ensuring the implementation is a key element for the success of a regional innovation strategy. However, European best practices show that this is a long term process, which needs to be adapted continuously and build sustainable structures beyond the completion of a RIS project. Consequently "funding" is becoming a crucial issue for adapting and operating the strategies.

Central to the implementation of visions described here above is also the 2007-2013 Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP), which will run in parallel with the Seventh Framework Programme for Research (FP7) (see details hereunder).

The CIP and FP7 are intended to be highly synergistic in their contributions to the Lisbon strategy. They may be characterised by saying that FP7 will focus on research and technological development while CIP concentrates on support for SMEs and the development of innovation policies.

8.1 Competitiveness and Innovation Programme[7]

In order to support innovation and competitiveness of the regions, the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme (CIP) encompasses innovation supporting actions in the fields of energy, eco-innovation and ICT in close coordination with the 7th Framework Programme. The CIP with a budget of approximately EUR 3.6 billion foresees an increase of 60% in financial instruments supporting entrepreneurship and innovation by 2013 compared to 2006.

The CIP will promote through its programmes (1. Entrepreneurship and Innovation, 2. ICT policy support and 3. Intelligent Energy – Europe II) innovation support services for technology transfer and use of existing and new technologies in the fields of ICT, energy and environmental protection, as well as the development and coordination of national and regional innovation programmes and policies. It will also improve the access of innovative SMEs to external sources of financing.

The Entrepreneurship and Innovation Programme of CIP will support in particular horizontal activities improving, encouraging and promoting innovation in enterprises. These objectives are to be achieved by fostering sector-specific innovation, clusters, networks of excellence, public-private innovation partnerships, cooperation with relevant international organisations and the application of innovation management. It will also contribute to the provision of innovation support services on a regional level, in particular for trans-national knowledge and technology transfer and management of intellectual and industrial property.

8.2 The 7th Framework Programme[8]

The 7th Framework Programme (FP7) is one of the main financial tools through which the European Union supports research and development activities covering almost all scientific disciplines. It succeeds the achievements and huge interest of relevant actors in the 6th Framework Programme. Within FP7 there will be four major programmes effective in the Programme Period 2007-2013:

- Cooperation
- Capacities

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[7] http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/enterprise_policy/cip/index_en.htm
[8] http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7/home_en.html

- Ideas
- People

All programmes are aimed at increasing funding possibilities of collaborative research in Europe in the new programme period, delivered through a mix of existing and new schemes and by doubling the annual contribution to R&D compared to FP6 with an overall financial EC contribution of EUR 50.521 million.

8.4 New Cohesion policy for the period 2007-2013

The programmes within the new Cohesion policy dispose of EUR 308 billion for investments in knowledge and innovation. They will be implemented in the framework of the following three objectives: Convergence, Competitiveness and Employment and European territorial cooperation.

8.4.1 Convergence

(EUR 264 billion - 78.5% of total funds, financed from ERDF, ESF and Cohesion Fund)

The scope of this measure is adequate to the current Objective 1 with focus on less-developed regions, by means of improving conditions for growth and employment by investing in human and physical capital; innovation and the development of the knowledge society; encouraging adaptability to economic and social change; protection of the environment; improving administrative efficiency.

8.4.2 Regional competitiveness and employment

(EUR 57.9 billion – 17.2% of total funds, financed from ERDF and ESF)

All regions not covered by the Convergence objective will benefit from the Competitiveness objective oriented on strengthening regional competitiveness and attractiveness through supporting innovation, the knowledge society, entrepreneurship, protection of the environment and risk prevention.

Both objectives will foster a business climate promoting the production, dissemination and use of new knowledge by firms. One of the major goals in making regional RTD innovation and education supply more efficient and accessible to firms, in particular SMEs, will be establishment of poles of excellence, bringing together high technology SMEs around research and technological institutions, or development and creation of regional clusters around large companies. Geographical proximity through the existence of SME clusters and innovation poles around public research institutions plays a key role in avoiding spatial dispersion of resources.

Businesses will be encouraged to make use of synergies (for example, technology transfer, science parks, ICT communication centers, incubators and related services, cooperation with clusters) and they will also provided with traditional support in the areas of management, marketing, technical support, and other professional and commercial services.

In order to reach the above-mentioned goals, various non-grant instruments such as loans, secured debt financing for subordinate debt, convertible instruments (mezzanine debt) and risk capital (e.g. seed capital and venture capital) will be actuated.

Grants are envisaged to be used to build and maintain infrastructures that facilitate access to finance (e.g. technology transfer offices, incubators, 'business angels' networks, investment readiness programmes). Guarantee and mutual guarantee mechanisms could also be supported to facilitate access to micro-credit by SMEs.

8.4.3 European territorial cooperation objective

(EUR 13.2 billion – 3.94% of total funds, financed from ERDF)

The purpose of this objective, inspired by the experience of the Interreg Community initiative, is to strengthen cooperation at three levels: cross-border cooperation through joint programmes; cooperation between transnational zones; networks for cooperation and the exchange of experiences throughout the Union. In this way, the cooperation objective will encourage a balanced, harmonious and sustainable development throughout the European area. This objective will support entrepreneurship, in particular the development of SMEs, tourism, culture, and cross-border trade, innovation, information and communication networks and services, environment/risk prevention, accessibility, tourism, culture and education.

The Commission is responsible for identifying a list of eligible cross-border regions and of transnational cooperation zones. The whole of the Union territory is eligible for financing of European cooperation and exchange networks.

8.5 Towards trans-regional RIS approaches

Certainly, the success of many RIS projects is due to cooperation with other (more experienced) partners/regions. An often existing but not always expressed wish of many (not to say most) RIS project coordinators and partners is to keep this initiated cooperation alive after the completion of the project.

Moreover, exchange of practices in the different EC networks and dissemination channels allow regions to identify potential partners to set-up cooperation within thematic areas highlighted in their regional innovation strategies. With this respect, the IRE Network supported by IRE Secretariat provides a useful platform for exchanging experience, getting access to good practice examples and finding potential collaboration partners.

9. REFERENCES

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