

EU's future R&I programme should build on territorial connections and be backed by strong cohesion policy

The elaboration of the EU's next R&I framework programme succeeding Horizon 2020 is currently under way against the backdrop of negotiations for the post-2020 EU budget. In a conference organised by the European Committee of the Regions on 20 February, local and regional representatives called for research and innovation funds to be oriented towards connecting regional innovation ecosystems in close synergy with cohesion policy instruments.

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has already called for the [overall expenditure ceiling to be raised to 1.3% of GNI](#), in order to ensure adequate financing for cohesion policy and research and innovation. The institution's First Vice-President **Markku Markkula** said: "The R&I programmes of the EU are not only designed to promote scientific excellence and the global competitiveness of Europe, but are also instrumental for sustainable growth and rendering our regions and cities smarter and more liveable. Ecosystem thinking and partnering between different cities and regions must therefore be one of the major guiding principles for the new framework programme."

Christophe Clergeau (FR/PES), rapporteur of a recent [CoR opinion](#) on EU's R&I programmes, pointed out the crucial role of structural and investment funds in the field of research and innovation. According to the Member of Pays de la Loire Regional Council, EU's future R&I policies should aim for improved synergies with different regional and European funding instruments and take greater account of smart specialisation strategies to build on excellence rooted in regions and cities.

"The next framework programme should be based on a place-based approach of R&I where regions and cities are recognised as full policy-makers and stakeholders at every level. Recognition of local collective initiatives and ecosystems, coherence of political objectives, complementarity of public policies, compatibility between financial instruments and co-construction of policies are key to implementing successful synergies with structural and investment funds", Mr Clergeau said.

He also suggested that the next framework programme should include new "territorial connections" action to recognise and fund regional excellence along the lines of the Vanguard Initiative. It would promote the complementarity of regional innovation ecosystems by creating consortia between regions that share their smart specialisation strategies and want to advance together towards commonly agreed goals.

The CoR's [SEDEC commission](#) adopted on 21 February a [draft opinion](#) which points out that future smart specialisation strategies should be based on interregional strategic cooperation and on a "regional discovery process" in

which regions pool their smart specialisation strategies to create sustainable links between regional ecosystems in the priority areas of smart specialisation.

“Promoting the cross-border dimension by creating interregional investment opportunities will facilitate the expansion of regional and local innovation in Europe. However, it is necessary to tackle the complexity of fund management and introduce appropriate and flexible ad hoc financing instruments that help to create an interregional cooperation ecosystem”, stressed rapporteur **Mikel Irujo** (ES/EA), delegate of the Government of Navarra in Brussels.

Participants of Tuesday’s conference also highlighted the importance of more cohesion and convergence in the field of research and innovation. In her intervention, [European Parliament rapporteur Soledad Cabezón Ruiz](#) (ES/S&D) stated that “we need more regions of excellence in Europe”. She also called for Member States and regions to increase the share of R&I funding to reach the commonly agreed goal of 3% of GDP.

José Ignacio Cenicerros (ES/EPP), chair of the SEDEC commission and President of the Government of La Rioja, concluded: “It is important to set out concrete measures to reduce and if possible reverse the talent drain in our regions and to bridge the innovation gap both between Member States and between regions. We also call for a better sharing of research results between regions and the opening of the research infrastructures to the needs of local actors, in particular in the field of agriculture, energy efficiency and smart urban transport and infrastructures.”

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