

#WIRE2024



13–14 | November | 2024

Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE)

Budapest

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Starter Kit

**practical guide for overviewing the landscape of
innovative European regional initiatives**

The Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE) Conference serves as the main European policy forum dedicated to innovation and regional development. In 2024, it was organized by Hungary's National Research, Development, and Innovation Office (NRDIO) under the Hungarian EU presidency in Budapest on November 13-14, supported the European Commission.

The European Union established several initiatives for the period of 2021-2027 that include the topic of regional innovation, such as the European Regional Development Fund, Regional Innovation Platforms, Smart Specialization Strategies, the Regional Innovation Scoreboard and the Regional Innovation Valleys. Project success stories and lessons learnt can be examined in the context of European competitiveness through the contribution of speakers from Commission level, as well as national, regional, and local professionals.

Panel discussions and keynote speeches provided insights into the EU's initiatives for bridging innovation gaps and fostering a collaborative European regional ecosystem, with contributions from experts such as Manuel Heitor, the chair of the High-Level Group on FP10. The program explored various initiatives, concepts, and tools introduced by the European Union, like the European and Regional Innovation Scoreboards. To provide a comprehensive and detailed overview, speakers evaluated the effectiveness of these tools, presented successful practices, and highlighted synergies between European and regional funding schemes.

The discussions on closing innovation gaps and enhancing regional collaborations are timely, coinciding with the new Commission's focus accelerating European competitiveness, especially at the forefront of the new European Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, and the Competitiveness Compass.

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Week of Innovative Regions in Europe (WIRE)

Day 1 | 13 November

13:00-14:00
Breakout session 1.
New challenges, new dimensions
of regional disparities?

Panelists:



Wolfgang Münch
Senior Expert
DG REGIO, European Commission



Prof Dr Igor Calzada, MBA
University of the Basque Country (EHU/UPV) and Barbaque (Spain) and Cardiff University/WISERD (UK)



Joanna Kubiak
Acting Director
Wielkopolska Region
Brussels Office



Silvia Gomez Recio
Secretary General
Young European Research
Universities Network (YERUN)

Moderator:
Viktor Varjú
Director
Institute for Regional Sciences,
HUM-REN Center for Economic
and Regional Studies

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OF THE EU 2024

National, regional and local initiatives and best practices

The exchange of national, regional and local best practices is essential for boosting the performance of regions across Europe, as it allows the transfer of knowledge and experience that can be adapted to different local circumstances. This helps bridging the innovation gap between more and less developed regions, promoting simultaneous growth and cohesion across Europe. By learning from each other's successes and failures, regions can implement effective policies and improve their local innovation ecosystems. Ultimately, this cooperation will strengthen European competitiveness as a whole, ensuring every regions' successful contribution to the EU's economic and innovation objectives.

Hungary

In a dedicated panel discussion about Hungary's practice for fostering regional innovation, Hungary's new regional innovation model was introduced. The concept focuses on five key pillars, such as tax breaks, dedicated state funding for RDI, a successful FDI policy, stronger university-industry connections, and resource concentration. According to the Hungarian experts at the conference, this new initiative has leveraged creativity and strong SME performance to thrive. Innovation inside regions often starts at universities rather than companies, which is why collaboration between all local stakeholders is beneficial.

The Hungarian experience suggests that territorial innovation platforms should provide advice to the government and closely engage with SMEs to meet their needs. The future lies in fostering process innovation alongside product innovation to enhance competitiveness.

It is also important to have a dual perspective on international and domestic research infrastructure development both in practice and in policymaking. The advantage of knowing the wider innovation infrastructure to avoid redundancies was also emphasized.

Bulgaria

Gabrovo's role was highlighted as the geographical centre of Bulgaria, and its contribution to establishing an innovation ecosystem. This region represents a great success story, because of active collaboration with European partners and its status as the only region in Bulgaria with a Smart Specialisation Strategy.

Poland

Poland's Wielkopolska region was presented as a success story for green transition territorial plans. In the policymakers' experience, the key parts of a successful green transition are creating a climate neutral economy, ensuring quality landscape and activating citizen participation.

Czech Republic

The success story of using structural funds to enhance user experience was shared in Czech regions. Speakers highlighted how funding for infrastructure and equipment attracted scientists to the Czech Republic.

Finland

Ostrobothnia was highlighted as Finland's most industry-dominated region, with the highest R&D intensity. The green transition has a great success in this region, driving a new wave of industrialization, positioning Ostrobothnia as a significant producer of renewable energy, particularly through its on- and offshore wind parks.



European Union programmes and initiatives

A comprehensive understanding of regional development and innovation performance requires both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Large-scale data series and structural indicators, such as the European Innovation and Regional Scoreboards provide an empirical basis for assessing local differences, strengths and challenges. At the same time, case studies based on qualitative insights provide valuable context that helps policy makers to understand the reasons behind the numbers.

These tools are not just good for evaluation, but also for strategic planning. According to the speakers of the WIRE conference, the Scoreboards play an important role in enabling lower-performing regions to learn from leading innovators by being able to analyse successful strategies in terms of specific indicators.

International data sets allows regional and national policy makers to set clear priorities, monitor progress, identify areas of high potential and address local challenges. They also help to attract foreign

investment, and promote long-term international partnerships based on shared strengths and objectives. Regularly updated data sets support decision making, while being able to identify bigger trends provide guidelines for future directions, learning from the impact of past initiatives. A growing drive to incorporate emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and cloud computing into data collection for these tools was also emphasized at the conference.

In addition to data sets, practical and innovative tools, such as regional innovation hubs are also important to strengthen regional innovation capacities and foster collaboration between stakeholders. Synergies between European, national, regional and local levels are needed to achieve real progress. Each region has unique traditions, challenges and opportunities, which is why European policy needs to focus on inclusivity alongside competitiveness. Sharing good practices and learning from each other is key to achieving a unique innovation ecosystem, and Europe has a central role in giving these exchanges a platform.

European Innovation Scoreboard

The European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) is an essential tool for assessing and comparing the research and innovation performance of EU Member States and selected non-EU countries. Based on 32 key indicators, the Scoreboard provides a comprehensive overview that allows national and European policy makers to assess whether regions are moving in the right direction, identifying their strengths, weaknesses and areas of potential growth and collaboration.

At the WIRE conference, speakers stressed the importance of using the EIS to measure inequalities between and within countries, emphasizing its role in developing evidence-based, targeted policies. The Scoreboard enables regions to set clear, measurable priorities and develop tailored strategies by providing regularly updated benchmarking and insights into region-specific challenges based on local datasets. The European policymakers also

noted the importance of reviewing trends in past data to assess the impact of past policies and guide future decisions.

Speakers also emphasised the value of international data collections such as the Eurostat and the European Governance Quality Index, which allow underperforming regions to learn from leading innovators and develop long-term partnerships based on common characteristics, leading to a more competitive European ecosystem. Tools such as the EIS support more inclusive and balanced innovation policies, and also strengthen the regional dimension of EU initiatives.

Discussions at the WIRE conference have highlighted the need for more flexible, region-centred approaches, especially in the context of the green transition, where national funding schemes play a key role.

Regional Innovation Scoreboard

The Regional Innovation Scoreboard (RIS) serves as a regional counterpart to the European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS), evaluating the innovation performance of European regions using a selected set of indicators, providing a more detailed, territorial perspective on innovation performance. Based

on the results of RIS and EIS, the speakers see it as essential for the future EU framework programmes, such as the FP10 to take regional disparities into account and focus more on exploiting the specific resources of each territory.

New European Innovation Agenda

The new European Innovation Agenda aims to make Europe a global leader in deep tech innovation and start-ups. Launched in 2022, it aims to foster the development and market uptake of cutting-edge technologies that address major societal challenges, in particular through innovation procurement.

Its goal is to modernise public services and support the growth of innovative businesses in Europe. The vision is for Europe to become a hub where the best talents work in partnership with leading companies, enabling deep technological innovation to flourish and pioneering solutions to be created that are widely adopted.

Regional Innovation Valleys

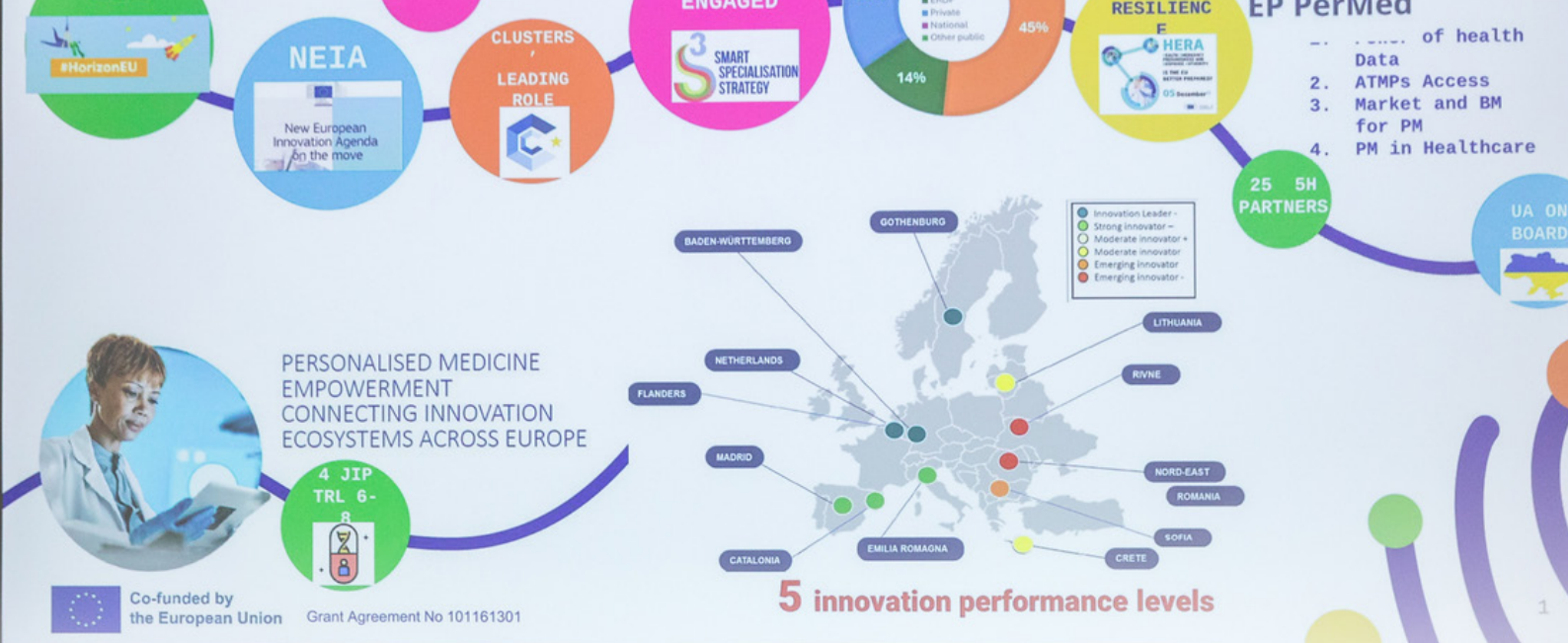
The Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) initiative is one of the flagship actions of the New European Innovation Agenda. It aims to unlock Europe's full innovation potential by fostering closer collaboration between more and less innovative regions.

RIVs promote complementary partnerships that align with each region's unique strengths, building on their smart specialization strategies, with the objective of narrowing the innovation gap between them and tackling shared societal challenges through advanced technologies.

At the WIRE conference, speakers emphasized the transformative nature of the RIV concept, particularly its role in strengthening collaboration within the quadruple helix, which means engaging public authorities, industry, academia, and civil society in a cohesive effort. They highlighted that the initiative encourages a new form of interregional cooper-

ation, where up to 100 committed regions coordinate their research and innovation investments and policies to build stronger, interconnected ecosystems. The platform created by RIVs also provides an important opportunity for companies from all regions to showcase their innovations, regardless of their current level of development.

Speakers further underlined the important role of robust regional innovation ecosystems in connecting researchers, universities and businesses, and called for strong support in future EU frameworks such as FP10 to ensure that local and regional efforts are fully integrated into broader European innovation strategies. RIVs were recognized as a powerful tool for fostering innovation-driven collaboration, with the potential to create a link between regional innovation and collaboration.



Innovation for place-based transformations ACTIONbook

The “Innovation for Place-based Transformation” initiative is supported by three key operational documents that guide and stimulate regional innovation efforts.

The core of it is the ACTIONbook, which outlines a series of activities aimed at promoting strategic, mission-driven partnerships within and across institutions, regions, and sectors. It serves as a practical framework to support the development of innovation strategies in line with regional strengths and societal needs. The ACTIONbook is

supported by territorial exercise documents, which showcase real examples of transformative innovation across Europe. In addition, the ACTION Toolkit provides practical tools and resources for stakeholders to effectively implement the activities outlined in the ACTIONbook.

Together, these documents form a comprehensive package to support policy makers and practitioners in promoting regional innovation through Regional Innovation Partnerships (RIPs) and place-based strategies.



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