




Smart Specialisation Strategy
2021-2027 of
LOMBARDY REGION

Abstract



The Smart Specialisation concept has shaped regional innovation policies in the last seven years, being integrated into the 2014-2020 cohesion policy as an “ex ante conditionality” for European regions to obtain funding for R&I actions from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

In line with policy orientations for the programming period 2021-2027, which maintain the smart specialisation approach as an “enabling condition”, Lombardy Region has consolidated its RIS3 with the aim of further strengthening its place-based innovation policies.

Following the path launched in the previous programming period, the Smart Specialisation Strategy 2021-2027 confirms its “integrated trajectory” to foster regional growth in the framework of the five strategic policy objectives under the new EU Cohesion Policy along with the seven applicable criteria to ensure a “good governance of the Smart Specialisation Strategy”.


The final objective being the design of a regional research and innovation strategy for smart specialisation as a means to deliver a more targeted ERDF support and an integrated approach to harness the potential for smart growth in the Lombardy region, focusing on key R&I priorities and building upon regional competitive strengths.

The operationalisation of this methodology is a living document - open to modifications, integrations and regular updates – which has been drafted through an extensive co-creation process, involving all relevant stakeholders at various level, and in line with EU, national and regional policy orientations.

Besides, the new scenario due to the explosion of the Covid-19 pandemics has been duly taken into account, so to embed the new emerging socio-economic needs and implications into the strategy intervention.

The new regional RIS3 is thus consistent with EU Cohesion Policy objectives as well as other current strategic orientations, targeting two main ambitious challenges and focusing on eight specialisation areas, hereafter called “innovation ecosystems”.

At the core of this strategy and its directives a true *human centred approach* is identified, along with the reflection of the “Responsible Research and Innovation” (RRI) and “Open Innovation” principles.



The main objective of the RIS3 Strategy 2021-2027 for Lombardy Region is the identification of priority assets, resources, competencies and potential to lead the investments in research and innovation as well as industrial modernisation and technology transfer.

The policy framework in which the Strategy will be operationalised is determined by the specific scopes of the EU Cohesion policy as influenced by the orientations for the recovery after the Covid-19 crisis.

In such an articulated political and operational framework, the RIS3 2021-2027 identifies two main challenges to address:



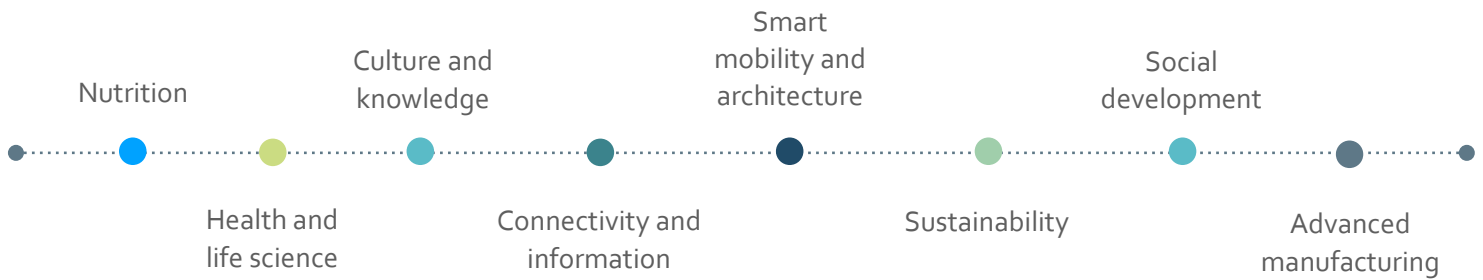
In line with the developments occurred within the RIS3 2014-2020, Lombardy Region has adopted a new paradigm to define and develop research and innovation policies based on a *human centric approach*, where the citizen is not only the end user of a product or service, but above all he is considered a co-designer of policy decisions or co-creator of R&I solutions. The citizen thus becomes a fundamental pivot of all those processes which contribute to the well-being and safety of the society we live in.

In order to respond more effectively to this need and to concretely translate this approach, the regional government is asked to modify the traditional way of understanding the economic and social context.

The concept of "innovation ecosystems"¹ represents a different tool for the comprehension and interpretation of the territorial dynamics and regional developments by taking into account the different set of specificities, competencies and actors, which contribute to satisfy the needs of the citizen and concur in the generation of innovative capacity. Nonetheless, this approach allows to better grasp the cross-cutting and cross-sectorial elements which characterise territorial development and its potential.

¹ Ecosystem: set of public and private actors and of associations that operate in a specified territory, in which activities and resources contribute to satisfy an individual or collective need

According to this logic, the following 8 Innovation Ecosystems have been identified for the RIS3 Strategy:



For each ecosystem, the Strategy illustrates the general needs, involved actors, regional priorities, and relevance in terms of R&I potential.

In order to implement the identified methodology and concretely achieve the targeted objectives, the RIS3 Strategy further envisages the definition of an action plan, which is meant to address the targeted challenges, while taking into account the weaknesses and threats as indicated in the swot analysis, which the socio-economic and innovation system is expected to tackle. Below the swot analysis² in brief which leads to an articulated action plan:

STRENGTH

- sectorial diversification
- a high rate of industrialisation
- strong activities in R&D
- interregional networks
- active universities and research centres

WEAKNESSES

- low number of patents
- difficulties in adopting sustainable business models
- high costs to introduce innovations

OPPORTUNITÀ

- improvement of sectorial laws
- models of e-commerce
- development of enterprises' open innovation
- knowledge about regional and European tenders
- digitalisation of enterprises

THREATS

- low levels of digital skills
- lack of competences
- difficulties of investment for PMI
- lack of information

² "La Strategia di Specializzazione Intelligente per la Ricerca e l'Innovazione di Regione Lombardia", 4. Gli Ostacoli e le Opportunità alla diffusione dell'innovazione", p. 16-17

The action plan includes four main interventions:

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An enabling action to reinforce the regional system of research and innovation through the paradigms of RRI and Open Innovation

A large, stylized number '2' in a blue color, appearing to be a page from a book with a white shadow on the left side.

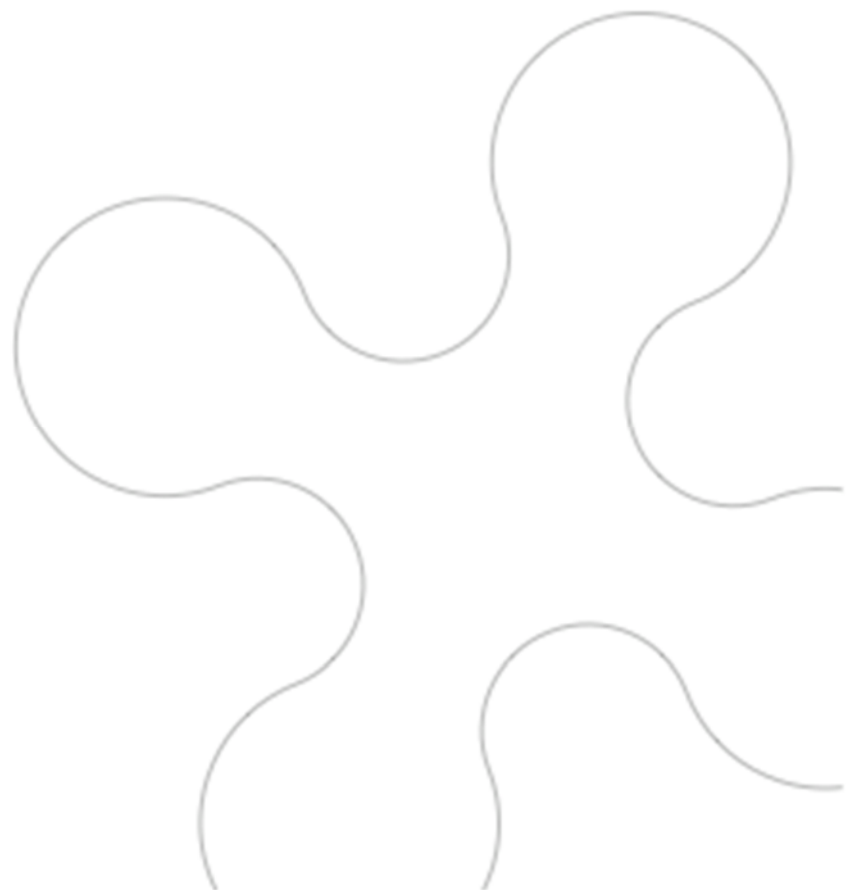
An action supporting the technological transfer as well as the industrial research and innovation in the "innovation ecosystems"

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An action supporting investments to foster digital transition and the adoption of sustainable development models

A large, stylized number '4' in a light green color, appearing to be a page from a book with a white shadow on the left side.

An action supporting the internationalisation and the attractiveness of the regional system



THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DISCOVERY PROCESS

The Entrepreneurial Discovery Process is one of the core elements of a Smart Specialisation Strategy, being defined as a bottom-up approach which allows to self-discover the competitive niches, priority assets, challenges and potentialities of the territory, through the active involvement of local stakeholders (the so-called quadruple helix actors), who decide in a decentralised and collective manner which activities are considered as being most promising and should be targeted in a S3 policy.

The regional EDP has truly played a significant role in the definition of the RIS3 for Lombardy by encouraging the co-creation of policies and actions through active interactions among private actors, public institutions, academic and research centres, as well as civil society, who have been engaged in different ways.

Indeed, the Lombardy Region conceives the EDP as a continuous process to be carried out in a systematic and dynamic way so to ensure that all relevant actors are committed in the identification and update of strategic priority domains, technological assets and opportunities to pursue, also with reference to the international context.

During the programming period 2021-2027, the development of an “adaptive” S3 will be ensured through the implementation of a constant Entrepreneurial Discovery Process with the adoption of new policies for stakeholder engagement and the use of innovative methodologies for the collection of priorities and needs, for example big data analysis, artificial intelligence solutions and technological roadmaps.

The Entrepreneurial Discovery Process is particularly needed to build up the RIS3 Work Programmes for Research and Innovation which are the operational part of the Strategy. Work Programmes include the technological priorities, the expected impacts and the way of Lombard R&I system to compete to the attainment of the Agenda 2030 SDGs.

Two-year Work Programmes allow to respond to new technological developments and societal challenges, ensure an ongoing stakeholder engagement and provide a link between the strategic level and implementation.



INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

International cooperation plays a fundamental role in the implementation of the Smart Specialisation Strategy with the aim of encouraging the acquisition and exchange of knowledge, strengthening skills, developing synergies, and carrying out joint activities with the scope of enriching regional existing tools, on one hand, and encouraging the realisation of initiatives with European added value (for example in relation to the strengthening of strategic value chains).

In this regard, the active involvement of Lombardy Region in several European frameworks and networks will be forged so to ensure a strategic implementation of interregional cooperation activities to support the internationalisation of local companies and the attractiveness of the regional system in general.

In particular, the active participation in the Thematic Platforms for Smart Specialisation, promoted by the European Commission, together with the activities implemented within other European networks– such as the Vanguard Initiative, Enterprise Europe Network, Four Motors of Europe, Alpine Macro-Region (EUSALP) – will represent the reference framework for the implementation of the so-called “outward looking” dimension, also in the light of the opportunities linked to the programming period 2021-2027.

THE GOVERNANCE OF THE RIS3

In coherence with the framework set up by the Regional Law n. 29/2016 "Lombardy is Research and Innovation", and in the light of the experience gained so far, the management of the RIS3 is ensured through a well-structured and multilevel governance, considered as a necessary requirement to handle the complexity of a RIS3.

Following the “Responsible Research and Innovation” (RRI) paradigm, representatives of the relevant regional stakeholders are committed with variable geometry, starting from the Regional Ministries Committee, the Working Group involving officials from the different regional departments, the Lombard Technological Clusters,

the so-called “Pact of Development³”, the Regional Research and Innovation Forum⁴ to business associations, research entities, non-governmental organisations etc.

Such a multi-level governance ensures that the RIS3 design and implementation is carried out across different territorial scales and accountability levels.

³ Pact of Development – Pact for Development, Economy, Labor, Social Cohesion with the participation of the entrepreneurial entities, associations, trade unions etc.

⁴ Regional R&I Forum - established by the Regional law n. 29 of 2016 "Lombardy is Research and Innovation", with advisory and information functions, composed of 10 highly qualified experts in the field of science, innovation and companies and selected through an international public tender procedure.



MONITORING THE RIS3

The monitoring and evaluation phase represents a fundamental process to comprehend research and innovation results and to provide appropriate social and economic feedback to public investments.

Lombardy Region outlines 4 types of indicators:



The monitoring and evaluation activity will be implemented annually, following two different levels:



an annual monitoring based on the categories of available indicators mentioned above (the 4 categories)

a specific preparatory assessment finalised to update the Work Programmes for Research and Innovation, which summarises the evidence produced by the annual monitoring, with the aim of providing useful information for updating the plans.