



Youth4Cohesion

Webinar on a “Smarter EU”

Tuesday, 29 June 2021

Working language: English

FINAL REPORT

Background

The first [Youth4cohesion](#) thematic webinar was held on 29 June from 10:15 to 12:00. The webinar opened a series of online events that will aim at making the new Cohesion Policy known to Adriatic Ionian young people and at equipping them with the knowledge and skills for engaging in it actively and meaningfully.

The event focused on the policy priority “a smarter Europe” and provided an overview of European innovation policies, how they are supported in the frame of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic Ionian Region (EUSAIR) and as implemented by European Territorial Cooperation programmes and projects.

Smart Specialisation was presented as a place-based approach to innovation, jobs and growth that aims at identifying and developing competitive advantages that can lead to interregional and international synergies, complementarities and collaboration. Passing from being an ex-ante conditionality for receiving EU structural Funds during to a fully-fledged and flexible policy instrument in the 2014-2020 programming period, it provides a flexible and comprehensive methodology to support Western Balkan governments in the design of smart specialisation and other innovation policies.

The webinar helped participants better grasp the role of young people in innovation and the related concrete opportunities offered to them by EU-funded projects under Interreg programmes (e.g. Interreg ADRION and Interreg CBC IPA Italy-Albania-Montenegro).

The event was attended by university students, youth workers and young people representing youth organisations in 10 countries of the Adriatic Ionian area, pre-selected through an open Call for Expression of Interest.



This project is co-funded by
the European Union

Agenda

10:15-10:30 Registration of participants

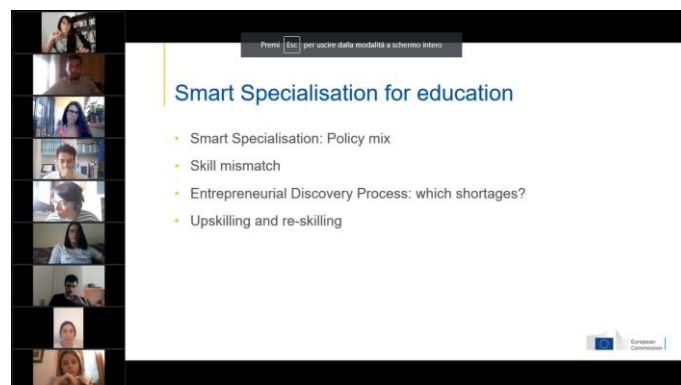
10:30-11:00 EU innovation policies with a focus on the Adriatic Ionian region

Introduction by Ms Maria Luisa Esposito, EU Project Officer, Secretariat of the Adriatic Ionian Euroregion

- *Smart Specialisation Strategies, education and skills for a more innovative Adriatic Ionian area, Ms Elisa GERUSSI, Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission*

The first session presented the main topic of EU innovation policies and how the European Commission is supporting an innovation agenda in the Western Balkan countries. Innovation often depends on exchanges and spill-overs from cooperation between clusters or knowledge hubs, and research and innovation networks are increasingly global, interregional, cross-border and macro-regional cooperation can be essential to smart specialisation.

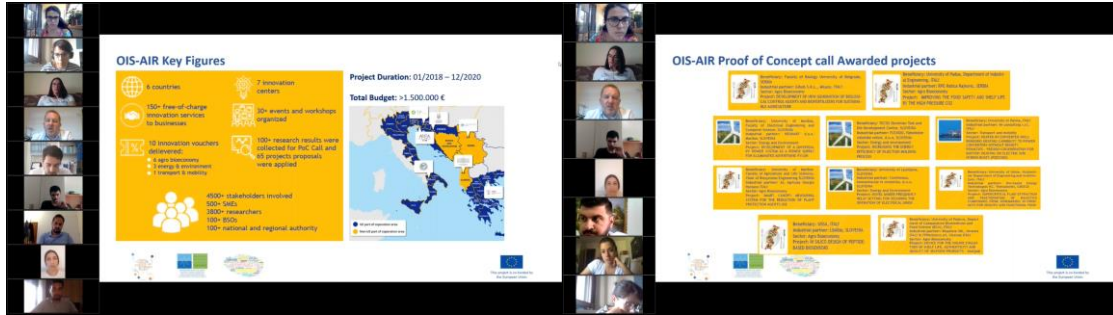
As representative of the Joint Research Centre of the European Commission, Ms. Gerussi focused her presentation on the Smart Specialisation in EU Enlargement and Neighbouring Region project. She pointed out how Smart Specialisation can benefit from improved collaboration among research, industry and public authorities, also through education opportunities to face skills mismatch and promote upskilling and re-skilling processes.



11:00-11:45 Innovation as implemented through territorial cooperation projects

- *Smart Specialisation in the Adriatic Ionian region and support to innovation projects, Mr Christian SPRINGER, Project Manager, Croatian Chamber of Economy, Partner of the Interreg ADRION “OIS-AIR” project*

The second session focused on innovation as implemented through two territorial cooperation projects. Mr. Springer presented the [OIS-AIR project](#) and explained how the action supported the establishment of an innovation transnational hub in the Adriatic-Ionian Region. Also, he illustrated how innovative SMEs, start-ups & spin-offs, young entrepreneurs and innovators in the Adriatic Ionian Region were provided free of charge innovation audit and were involved into international R&D collaborations aimed at technology transfer. As a result of this action, through a *Proof of Concept* Call, the project awarded 10 vouchers to young researchers and young innovators each worth 18.500 €m thus concretely supporting them into testing their innovation technologies and ideas.



- *Involving young aspiring innovation entrepreneurs in building a Smart Tourism Destination in the cross-border area, Ms Valentina NDOU, University of Salento, Partner of the Interreg IPA CBC IT-AL-ME project “NEST – Networking for Smart Tourism Development”*

Ms. Ndou presented the [NEST project](#) as an action which supported tourism entrepreneurs in collecting knowledge about the innovation and digital tools (e.g. artificial intelligence, big data solutions and other technologies) that can be used to innovate tourism services and products and thereby improve companies' competitiveness and revenues. Ms. Ndou illustrated the business model canvas that was developed by the project, focusing on the several aspects that need to be accounted for in order to develop innovative ideas in the smart tourism sector. A smart tourism destination toolkit and a roadmap for smart tourism entrepreneurial development were created as well. As a result of the project, a large community of stakeholders was created, including public authorities at governmental level and private companies as well as thematic experts, all potentially concerned by the creation of a single, cross-border smart tourism destination in the Italy-Albania-Montenegro cooperation area.



- Live Poll

With this first webinar, participants got to think about the role of young people in innovation and the related concrete opportunities offered to them by EU-funded projects. After some discussions about the presentations, participants were invited to participate in a live poll that was aimed at learning the main takeaways from the event and their opinions about the role of youth as stakeholders of a more innovative Adriatic Ionian area.



- 1) What do you think could be the role of younger people in shaping a more innovative Adriatic Ionian area?
- 2) What should (regional or national or European) decision-makers take into account when programming innovation policies?
- 3) Do you know any example of innovation project/start-up that received public funding in your region?

Generally, participants showed a widespread interest in the topic of innovation, digital transformation and smart specialisation, also with reference to its impacts in economic sectors such as tourism, which according to them will see many developments in the post-pandemic era.

Young respondents were very clear in what they think should be the path to be taken to foster smart specialisation, namely stakeholders' engagement and qualitative analysis of needs so to grasp emerging cross-industry sectors.

The had the role of young people very clear:

- to stimulate the creation of innovative business models, to mainstream new ideas and strategies that are more in tune with their visions and values, while constantly addressing environment, climate change and sustainable development;
- to make EU values, that young people hold every much important, guide governments in removing the discrepancies between some areas, like in the Adriatic Ionian region, and involve young people in building a new, more inclusive, digital and greener European Union;
- to disrupt the status quo and be the agents of change within the old structures as to challenge the governments to find new ways to work with civil society in the Adriatic Ionian area and to implement new business/education models through design thinking and non-formal education.

When asked what decision-makers should take into account when programming innovation policies, some clear answers popped dealing with regional cooperation, joint activities and clean energy, and in particular:

- boost creation of innovation networks and work synergistically on S3;
- valorise research and synergies among entrepreneurs and research institutions;
- enhance cohesion and cooperation among countries;
- support policy-makers and liaison with national and regional authorities, stakeholders and civil society.

Some specific suggestions to decision-makers included to tackle:

- gender balance and gender mainstreaming practices;
- social impact of innovation policies;
- education and removing the cultural obstacles to innovation (e.g. orthodox educational model in the Western Balkans);
- bureaucratic simplification;
- cross-sector and multi-actor approach to policy design and implementation.

When thinking to the obstacles to the development of a balanced and effective innovation policy in the Adriatic Ionian area, young people pointed out the regional discrepancies and the fact that Western Balkan countries generally lag behind EU countries.

Knowledge of innovation projects in respondents' areas was quite a key. Almost 50% of them could recall about a start-up or innovation initiatives in their areas or even EU innovation programmes (such as JEREMIE and EIT). This is very likely to depend on the fact that young people are very much interested in the topic as well as on a more efficient institutional external communication.