

SMART SPECIALISATION– A Simple Introduction

Well, it's a new term but in all the best traditions it includes some evidence of re-manufacturing!

So WHY is it IMPORTANT to get acquainted with this trendy concept?

Let us make a few suggestions on this matter:

- **Behind the rhetoric it is quite simple and you may have been doing it for years;**
- **The EU has latched onto the concept since 2010 and now requires member states to have a National Smart Specialization Strategy as part of the 2014-20 round of Cohesion Policy funding.**

SO WHAT IS IT?

If you look at the main conceptual and strategic documents that have been produced in numbers recently, Smart Specialization ...

- **is based on a sound analysis of a country's or a region's 'niche' strengths and infrastructure;**
- **looks at the region's assets and the local context;**
- **identifies innovation potential, e.g. the capacity of local universities;**
- **focuses policy support and investments on key national and regional priorities.**

PUT SIMPLY there are a few principles at the basis of Smart Specialization that ought to be kept in mind:

- **It's the "Pareto" principle – Smart Specialization dictates a focus of 80% of the work on where there is already a growing medium;**
- **Every region of Europe cannot have bio-technology, nano-technology, games software clusters...but needs to figure out its traditional strengths looking at its economic history timeline;**
- **For Bulgaria it means more focus on agro-food, forestry and software in Sofia and NOT areas of technology with no PhD students and ageing professors. But it does include "Green Energy" and "Solar Harvesting" because they are natural links to the basic USP of the Country. And of course it does require consideration of "The Land of Wine and Roses".**

SO, IN CONCLUSION (for now)

Exploitation of economies of scale and differentiation is made possible by specialization. But within the current context it is important that it is **not simply specialization of any kind but SMART Specialization.** Now how does that differ from the regular form of specialization? The **OECD** puts it bluntly: **"Smart specialization is a policy framework combining industrial innovation, as well as educational policies** (including their design, implementation, and evaluation), in order to promote **new growth opportunities based on innovation and knowledge.**"¹

Smart Specialization has been recognized as an indispensable instrument for EU Cohesion Policy, whereby the **Commission has developed the Smart Specialization Platform** that aims to provide professional advice to EU member states and regions in the process of developing innovation strategies.² The Commission gives the tool full credit labeling it a **"strategic approach to economic development through targeted support to Research and Innovation" and putting it at the basis of Structural Fund investments in R&I .**

NOW READ: Guide for Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization.³

¹ OECD web-site on Smart Specialisation:

<http://www.oecd.org/sti/innovationinsciencetechnologyandindustry/smartspecialisation.htm>

² The Smart Specialisation Platform official web-site:

<http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/home;jsessionid=z5nvRG5XWn5vWw1JH5GKGpK7jpwRTNg1FTvTnwSSfqsGMRV1Hfz7!11656385411359378807159>

³ "Guide to Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization (RIS 3), European Commission, May 2012, retrievable at:

http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=a39fd20b-9fbc-402b-be8c-b51d03450946&groupId=10157