Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

SMART_watch

REGIONAL OBSERVATORIES FOR SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SMART SPECIALIZATION

network | cooperation | tools

Preface

This third Minibook is focussed on the features and characteristics of the "ROs (Regional Observatories) network for Smart Specialisation", which - in perspective - is one of the outstanding outcomes of the SMART_watch project. ROs network is expected to be the main project result to continue to work after project conclusion, thus securing that the efficiency of RIS3 Observatories is maintained and the sustainability of project solutions is kept in time. The network intends to equip ROs with tools, procedures, practices to develop their offering of services and to sharpen their capacity to monitor S3 market. That is why this Minibook deals with the huge work done by SMART_watch partners - in cooperation with ROs' representatives and key experts - to outline the characteristics the network will have.

Starting from the conceptualisation of what the ROs network for Smart Specialisation should be, the Minibook explores the functionalities of the network, paying specific attention to roles of ROs, to the ways for contributions and interaction, to the use of internal and external communication, to the link with the S3 market actors (such as SMEs, larger companies, public autorities, R&D operators), to the ways to capture the real needs of end-users.

This Minibook highlights also the strategy of the network and how it was built up. Using a bottom-up approach, SMART_watch partners designed all the components of the strategy with ROs representatives, thus securing commitment and motivation.

A section on tools designed to empower the collective work of the network presents the operational instruments and procedures available for the network members. The state of art of network's formation and starting up is also dealt with in this publication.
The third Minibook is divided into four chapters that exhaustively cover the functional and operational strategy of the ROs network for Smart Specialisation.

Introduction

The Regional Observatories network for smart specialisation is at the heart of the **third Mini-book**. The concept at the base of the network is clarified in the text and its functional model is presented as well. Contents include the toolbox to support network's working and functioning rules. A closing section highlights the operative range of the network.

Highlights of contents

COMMON GOALS:
Understanding the concepts

SMART_watch network and its mission.

The **first chapter** is about the definition and conceptualisation of what a ROs network for Smart Specialisation should be in partners' and stakeholders' vision. The chapter analyses network participants' characteristics, structural and functional components, the success factors that are deemed necessary. From above, the mission of the network is outlined.

#COOPERATIONISCENTRAL:
Towards an operational model

A shared and participative path for a common strategy and working method.

Having set up the framework conditions for the network, partners elaborated the strategy by using a bottom up approach with the active involvement of ROs' representatives. This **second chapter** is about the strategy-making process and the outstanding results it achieved.

UNITY IS STRENGTH:
The tools to support cooperation

How the Smart Specialization network may connect Central Europe Countries.

The **third chapter** is about an extensive analysis and presentation of the tools, procedures and instruments available for network members to do their job. Tools are designed to help members exchange knowledge, to create new knowledge, to inform each other about new activities, projects and events.

MIND THE GAP:
Towards a new shared future

How the network is closing the gaps between the Regional Innovation Strategies and S3 end-users.

The **fourth and last chapter** is about the state of art of the network now. It presents the rules and structures that partners have designed to manage the network. It also highlights the operative range of the network, in terms of ROs involved and of activities carried out to attract them.

SMART_watch meeting - Creative section on networking, March 27th 2019 Kapfenberg, Austria

Common Goals
understanding the concepts

The stepping point for designing a strategy for the ROs network was a simple definition: a network is the connection between individuals, groups, institutions, companies and regions. More in detail - and in relation to SMART_watch - a network refers to alliances of independent stakeholders who temporarily join forces in order to achieve goals, create synergies and develop solutions to problems.

Participants in a network have several **characteristics**: for example, the stakeholders within a network bring in different abilities, motivations, and resources. Although they are connected via the network, they represent the nodes that use their mutual relationships with a certain degree of autonomy. The effects of synergy include information, experiences and ideas to be exchanged; moreover, sharing resources like equipment or premises can avoid parallel activities and investments.

The intended network of the SMART_watch project is expected to be a dynamic, target-oriented network, which deals with clearly defined tasks that are too complex to be handled by a single actor; resources of different actors are therefore combined and coordinated. The network the project partners are aiming for is characterised by a high degree of commitment to have a direct impact on the business processes of the actors involved.

Within the SMART_watch network, the following **articulation** is envisaged:

1. In the **"professional performance system"**, the network participants and associated stakeholders work together to achieve the network objectives (e.g. creation of a "transnational European network for innovation support"). This implies the distribution of tasks, the agreement on quality standards, a continuous innovation culture.

2. For this to be possible, a functioning **"social and organisational development system"** must be created. This system deals with questions of identity formation, motivation promotion and the development of a strong network culture. This implies capable actors to achieve network's objectives, mutual trust to secure succesful cooperation, network identity and culture (also promoted by names, design and logos), commitment to network and moderation.

3. The **"strategy and decision-making system"** forms the framework for action for the "professional performance system". This includes the development of a mission statement/overall concept, the definition of internal rules and network control. This implies also the identification of the objectives to be achieved by the network, the creation of value for customers, the decision-making ability and the willingness to evaluate constantly the success of the network.

4. The **"operational management system"** is responsible for controlling the overall process. This encompasses the leadership building process, the adoption of clear planning and monitoring mechanisms, the resource balancing, the ability to change, the market orientation.

5. Finally, a well-functioning **"information system"** (e.g. information procurement, knowledge management, documentation) is required to ensure a high degree of transparency and effective communication between the network participants. This implies the use of technical equipment, the sharing of a platform, the transparency and efficacy of the information flow.

If above are the characteristics of the network articulation, there are as well several success factors that SMART_watch partners assume as necessary.

1. **Resources for lasting commitment**: one of the most important resources within a network is represented by the people who are willing to commit themselves over a longer period of time. In particular, the relationship work requires sustainable care in order to sufficiently motivate the actors involved and to ensure that the network objectives are achieved. In larger networks, this work usually cannot be carried out by volunteers, so that the use of professional forces is appropriate.

2. **Long-term orientation**: the creation of a solid basis of trust between the actors involved will take years. Building on this, the various goals can then be tackled. It is important to actively involve the actors and to take their interests and needs into account, even if these are not always directly linked to the achievement of the objectives.

3. **Moderating approach**: moderating work is considered an essential guarantee for successful network building. External moderators can ensure that the originally intended goals are continuously pursued by supporting the distribution of the various tasks and intervening in an appropriate manner.

4. **Positive orientation**: network goals should be formulated as positive states of change or impact goals. This expands the possibilities for cooperation and contributes to focusing on the goals. To achieve this, the framework conditions must first be examined and the needs and wishes identified so that appropriate and realistic goals can be developed.

5. **Division of work**: information and agreements or understandings of general interest are shared with all actors in the network. The concrete implementation of individual measures or the development of the associated concepts, on the other hand, may take place in smaller groups.

6. **Formal rules**: these are the prerequisite for long-term and effective cooperation. In particular, the adherence to agendas and schedules, the recording of decisions and the formulation and documentation of goals and measures are emphasized.

7. **Visible activity**: the activities and successes of the network must be communicated and visible within ROs' own region, the EU and the general public. Public relations work can make an important contribution to this.

What about the mission of the network?

During the networking workshops held in Kapfenberg and Turin and which involved ROs' representatives, participants pointed out some characteristics they assumed as fundamental for the network **mission**.

To begin with, the goal of the network should be to receive a leadership in specialization by focusing the experience and knowledge of the network partners. Leadership should give the network attention and support from the **political side**, which should result in financial support at local, national and European level. As a consequence, the network should be a driving force for project planning and undertaking.

Moreover, **leadership** should make the network a reference point for knowledge transfer and skills development.

In addition to this, since the majority of ROs are directly or indirectly linked to **economic development** and thus to the political side, the further development of the regional innovation strategy is of great interest to the ROs. In fact, on one hand, the development of the RIS3 is a dynamic process and in a periodic way the strategy

has to be monitored and evaluated.

On the other hand, S3 has to be developed and the network could be very useful in **co-designing** the Smart Specialisation Strategy. To do this, the network could create a database of good and bad practices about S3 implementation and have access to the S3 platform.

Finally, part of the network mission should deal with the continuous improvement, updating and use of the **c-map** and of the **benchlearning platform**.
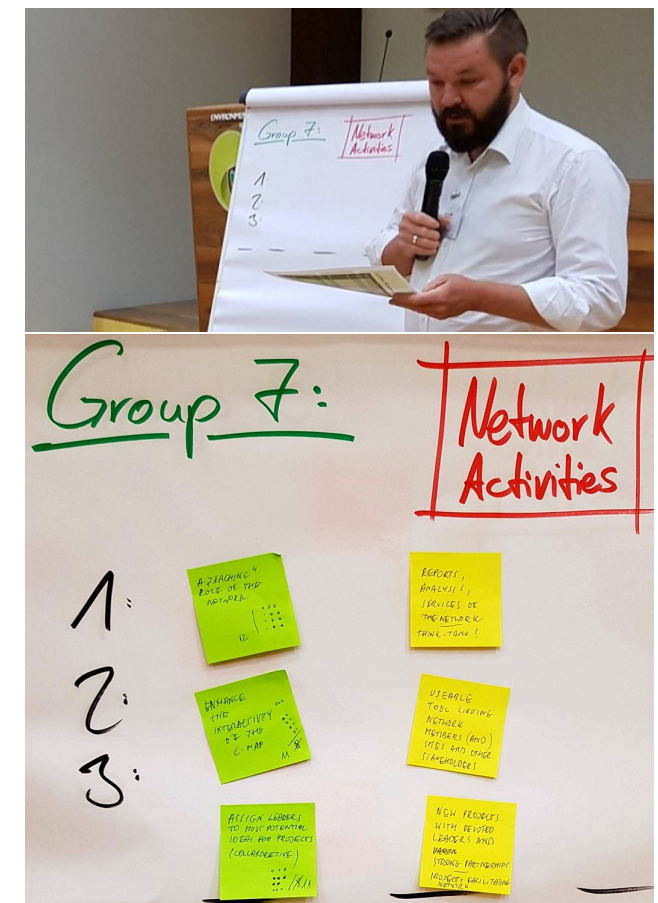
SMART_watch meeting - Sharing networking topics,
September 18th 2019 Turin, Italy

#CooperationIsCentral
towards an operational model

Having clarified the concept that SMART_watch partners had in mind for a network and its components, the consortium decided to put up the network strategy by working in close cooperation with the ROs. To do this, two workshops were organised with the representatives of the ROs in March and September 2019, aiming at analysing the network potentials, prerequisites, road map, management frames and communication patterns.

The networking workshop in Kapfenberg

After a long preparatory phase, aiming at having a good number of ROs attending the workshop, each participating ROs received a professionally prepared **Business Card** (figure below) with data referring to the company and the person, the service fields, the contact wishes. The purpose of the Business Cards was to support mutual acquaintance of ROs' representatives, thus easing the start of networking. 55 people from the ROs attended the workshop in Austria.

The exchange of experiences, ideas and expectations was assumed as pivotal to have an efficient and effective workshop. That is why SMART_watch partners designed a methodology to boost attendants' interaction. A check-in round aimed at presenting participants and their institutions and at splitting ROs into smaller specific groups. Then, the active networking part was realised and attendants discussed the issues related to the network. A final stage was dedicated to report results in plenary session.

In the introductory step, attendants' expectations were queried on-line using the Word Cloud tool Mentimeter, then displayed and discussed in real time during the presentation. Participants to the workshop were from organisations operating in different productive sectors, such as wood, health, energy, metal, consulting, research and university. Using the Metaplan techniques, 5 smaller groups were formed and the network rounds started. B-Cards were exchanged and information on organisations and fields of action were swapped. The focus was also on working styles and practices. As for the issues dealt with, these include: building clusters between firms, fund-raising, complementary and intelligent offerings for companies, project management, lobbying, training, pilot factories, start-ups, support for knowledge creation, support to internationalisation, design of European projects. Besides that, attendants discussed also organisational and functional issues for the network: topics like how to form common objectives, how to interact, which communication tools to use. They dealt also with their target groups (customers) which include: SMEs, large companies, public authorities, municipality, research institutions, universities.

The results of the workshop and the feedback from participants were useful to prepare the second meeting and to draft the network strategy.

SMART_watch meeting - Networking in practice, March 27th 2019 Kapfenberg, Austria

The networking workshop in Turin

The second workshop was focussed on the elaboration of the strategy for the network. As for the realisation, the workshop management techniques were the same as in Austria. Referring to the contents, the meeting was articulated in two sessions.

The first was about the exchange of information on the ROs and their experience concerning Smart Specialisation; a comprehensive presentation of the c-map was also realised. The second part went in deep in the strategy elaboration process. The preparation work done by partners before the meeting included a survey organised to let participants know about the contents of the meeting and expectations for is realisation.

In particular, the elaboration of the strategy was envisaged to be the outcome of the activity of eight groups (to be formed randomly during the meeting) working on the following topics:

1. **What could be an overall goal for a network strategy? What is an important strategy for you - and why?**
2. **What could be the useful benefits for the members in the network? What do you need to profit from the network?**
3. **How could this network be organized? How should the network be led?**
4. **What are the crucial roles in a network? What do you need to feel in "good company"?**
5. **What could be the possible input from the network members?**
6. **How could a feasible communication strategy be conducted? What are your needs in communication?**
7. **What kind of network activities do you expect? What should be the outcome of the activities?**
8. **In case there is an on-line network platform, what should be the content of this platform?**

Referring to the **overall goal**, the network should assume a leadership in specialization by focusing on the experience and knowledge of the network partners. From the leadership, the network should gain attention and support from the political side and as a result financial support from the European Union. The network should use its position for teaching and creating more and new projects.

Regarding the expected **benefits**, the network should capitalise from the European project's partners are involved in, with the aim to learn from existing projects and work for more EU funds. Moreover, the network should benefit from a political issue: since the ROs are involved in economic development, they should not only monitor the RIS 3 implementation, but contribute to its development as well, also with the collection and analysis of good and bad practices of S3 implementation.

With reference to **organisation**, the network should be managed by a professional manager with the help of an experienced and skilled staff. In general, the network should be organised according to a one-stop-shop principle, i.e. one position for all questions, requests and actions. Moreover, a cross-sectoral collaboration between the four fields of the Quadruple Helix Model (Government, Industry, University and Civil Society) should be applied to the network.
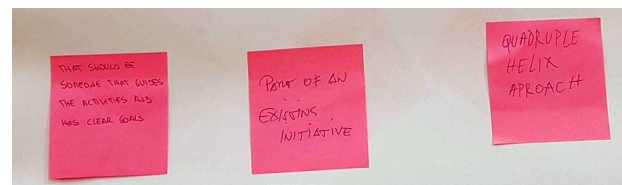

As for the **roles**, the network should have as a manager someone with a clear vision to push and motivate members. All participants should be active and proactive.

Moreover, it seems useful to have also a communication manager, responsible for the networks' growth. Concerning the atmosphere in the network, this could be relaxed and friendly if participants get a profit from membership.

Concerning **members' input**, the network should capitalise on the 4 Helix fields practical knowledge, exploiting partners' and ROs' experiences and good practices. On the other hand, it could also be useful to have input referring to need from members, in terms of training, services and products.

With reference to **communication**, the network should rely on the experience and know-how of a professional communicator, responsible for addressing and motivating the network members to exchange ideas, practices and results. Communication should cover the different thematic areas linked to the different specialisations. Moreover, the range of media to be used should be vast, as well as the channels to address target groups.

As for the **activities**, the network should have remarkable performances referring to three areas: first, a teaching role related to ROs' services, perspectives and development plans. Second, spread and improve the c-map use, especially to boost ROs' and SMEs' interaction. Finally, communication should be used to present to the external world the networks activities in order to develop new projects and attract new funds.
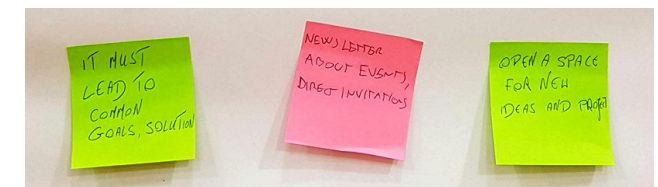
Eventually, concerning the **network platform**, there is need for a professional moderation of such a tool, to arrange the topics, so that they deal specifically with decisions and problems of the network. The platform should be articulated and divided by themes to ensure a high level of user-friendliness. This also includes the design of the platform with main graphic elements that have great usability. The platform could be used to distribute newsletters, information and invitations about events. Furthermore, there should be a free space on the platform to exchange new ideas or projects and to develop them.

Unity is Strength

the tools to support cooperation

Cooperation between ROs and within the network will be made possible by the availability of several tools that help members engage intensively in the exchange of knowledge and competences, to inform each other on new developments, on planned activities and successful practices.

The partnership has analysed the different tools that may help the network in creating cross-national links between business entities, public administration, non - governmental organisations, scientific and research institutions. These tools and channels support the network to merge ideas, exchange information and knowledge and to establish or reinforce cooperation between the actors and stakeholders of the RIS ecosystems.

The tools have different functionalities. First of all, they aim at easing all possibilities to come into contact with the ROs and to start interaction with them, thus increasing the synergy effects for the Regional Branch Observatories. Besides that, tools are designed to support the network to connect to Central Europe countries and reduce disparities and gaps between the RIS of the different regions.

In general, the toolbox consists of independent pillars, through which current and future members can have quick and easy access to required data and information. In addition to that, through the tools target groups may be aware of the network, its offered services, its structures, its activities. In this way, the tools support innovation-driven development and growth in connected regions.

The tools are: the network website, the cooperation platform, the c-map and the benchlearning tool, electronic newsletters, internal audits and action plan.

The **network website** has been designed with the aim to present on the Internet the network and its services in order to create contact possibilities and attract new members. The target group of the website is diversified: RIS managers in the regions, other ROs as well as innovative enterprises.
The site has two sections: one is public and deals with the presentation of the network and its activities. The internal section is the communication platform of the network.

The **cooperation platform** is a user-friendly and customizable tool designed to develop and share good practices, information on activities, results and final outputs. Its ultimate goal is to support the creation of a well-functioning model of operation and sustainable network of ROs. The platform contains and presents technology profiles and competence information on all the involved stakeholders and network members. Thematic categories in the platform include innovation trends and technology processes related to the project and Smart Specialisation. As a matter of facts, the platform is a repository of knowledge, competences, and business contacts for all users.
The platform is free of charge and accessible for end users; only membership and involvement to the intended network activities should be required.

The **c-map** (see also Minibook one for further details) contains and presents an overview of the main actors, operators and institutions monitoring technology trends and market developments in the area of Smart Specialisation and RIS in Central Europe. The c-map combines thematic and territorial dimensions of S3 implementation as it provides reports and findings for each sector of Smart Specialisation and each region. Moreover, the map offers cross-sectoral and cross-regional benchmark analyses enabling all the stakeholders to define the potential for interregional exchange of knowledge and to establish cross-border business activities.

The c-map allows the possibility to search in different categories like country, type of organization (university, public institution, research institute, company or faci-

litator), offered services and main objectives (company size and geographical orientation) in the directory.

Along with the c-map, the **benchlearning tool** allows comparing performances figures referring to ROs, thus enabling a dialogue with partners and institutions that provide examples of best practices (For more details on the functioning of the benchlearning tool, please refer to Minibook 1 as well). As a matter of fact, each region already collects a wealth of data on technology trends and market developments but does not necessarily evaluate them carefully or has no facilities or methods for effective monitoring and analysis. Therefore, the benchlearning tool would be a structured device for quickly developing successful practices on specific research issues as well as communicating them vividly to partners and stakeholders.

The **electronic newsletters** to be circulated by email are considered one of the most powerful digital marketing tools to be used by the network. Newsletters communicate in a personalised way with partners, clients, network members current and potential. In fact, potential target groups can be identified in each region if project partners update and share the contacts they have developed and maintained during previous cross-border activities. The network should develop a unified database of such contacts, in order to approach candidates by referring to successful implemented previous projects. To keep the newsletters appealing to all target groups, contents should be related to outstanding results of the network and to the perspectives in terms of benefits and synergies from collaboration.

The network intends to create benefits and added value by organising and participating to activities to inspire and connect people and regions for common interests and needs. **Thematic events** like workshops, study visits, trade exibitions and faires, round tables, ect. are used to deepen the exchange of experience, to share practices and different points of view as well as to address potential customers and new network members. Thematic events offer a direct way for an organization or project team to boost motivation, solve thematic problems, tap

into methods, become more international as well as raise its profile in the community and demonstrate its achievements to target groups and partners. Moreover, thematic events are a powerful tool for establishing and reinforcing cross-border cooperation schemes and networks.

During the preparatory phase for the design of the c-map and benchlearning, the supply side of the ROs' offer in terms of tools and services was explored through **audits**. The audits provided information on the project partners, on ROs and their networks, bringing out processes, activities, results, control systems, compliance with defined requirements or standards. The audits technique will continue to be used to provide information on network members, recording the respective service offerings and strengths. Audits will be used as well in the recruiting of new members: potential new members will present in an audit their qualifications, achievements, services, results.

An **action plan** sets out the needs for action, the objectives to be achieved, prioritises them, and bundles existing or new measures to achieve them. The action plan drawn up by the network consortium will include fields of activities aiming to promote the transnational collaboration of science and businesses in the monitored region and beyond. An action plan is periodically approved by the network, including all the activities to which the partners intend to devote themselves together.

YOU.

Mind the Gap

towards a new shared future

The fourth chapter is about the state of art of the network now. It presents the rules and structures that partners have designed to manage the network. It also highlights the operative range of the network, in terms of ROs involved so far.

In the final stage of the SMART_watch project, partners interacted to find out not only a conceptual definition, an operative model and tools for the network of ROs; they as well agreed on a structural framework for the network that is designed as follows.
The network has the name "Regional Observatories network for smart specialisation", is a non-profit association and has its headquarters in Plzeň in the Czech Republic.

The network main objective is to increase the efficiency of Regional Branch Observatories that monitor technology trends and market developments in the field of technology and Smart Specialisation. The network maintains a stable cooperation platform of participants of the innovation sectors and supply them with a set of market-relevant monitoring and benchmarking tools.

The association's activity is based on Smart Specialisation Strategies in project partners regions and it aims at elaborating knowledge management services and tools to generate products corresponding to the real needs of end-users. Besides that, the network provides suggestions to regional and national policy-makers for new perspectives and changes, strengthen innovation in Central Europe and increase transnational links for improving existing and developing new services.

The network's activities include the following:

- the establishment and maintenance of a cooperation platform;
- the sharing of knowledge, contacts and competences;
- the participation in public events and social media activities;
- the participation in business networks and initiatives;
- the publication of market-relevant facts, figures and news;
- the promotion of the network and its values.

The structure of the network

The organs of the network of ROs are the following:

- The **Management board** is formed by two directors who share leader tasks, distribute tasks to members and represent each other. The board is elected by the General Assembly for a period of two years. The board is responsible for representing the association and conducting its business activities. Moreover, the Management board prepares and manages the General Assembly, manages the association's assets, maintains the communication platform with support of all members and deliberates the admission of new members.

- The **specialised focus groups** are characterised either by sectors and field of activity or region.

- The **General Assembly** is the supreme body of the network, chaired by the board of directors. The Assembly establishes the guidelines for the work of the association and takes decisions on issues of fundamental importance. There are two kinds of members: regular members and the management board.

Members may be any business companies and institutions, regional authorities and key players providing knowledge, competences, contacts and infrastructure in the field of Smart Specialisation and innovative technologies who share and support the objectives of the association.

Members are of two kinds: full members with voting and speaking rights and general technology partner without voting rights but with the right to speak, paying fees for promoting their technologies through the network.

The network so far

The networking activity was carried out by partners in the final stage of SMART_watch project. The involving in the association took different shapes: the audits (see Minibook 1), the drafting of the c-map and the realisation of the workshops in Austria and Italy. This identification phase brought out the following situation.

The below-mentioned organisations have been involved on the base of their activity in one or more of the following Smart Specialisation sectors:

- Energy, sustainability and smart building;
- Future services;
- Health;
- ICT;
- Life science;
- Sustainable production technics and Industry 4.0.

As for their typology, they can be classified as follows:

- Business support organisation;
- Cluster;
- Digital Innovation Hub;

- Education;
- Innovation;
- Regional Development;
- Regional institution;
- Research;
- Technology.

Network members may use the cooperation platform and the c-map. Moreover, they can participate to the election of the board of directors and may put forward candidates.
Besides that, they can actively participate in the network activities and in the implementation of their objectives. Membership is acquired by a written declaration of accession to the board of directors and the successful completion of an internal audit.

Table n.1 *The organisations involved for the SMART_watch network*

| COUNTRY	N. OF ORGANISATIONS
AUSTRIA	8
CZECH REPUBLIC	8
GERMANY	10
HUNGARY	14
ITALY	23
POLAND	34
SLOVENIA	16

Source: SMART_watch project

Conclusions and outlook

This third Minibook dealt with the network of Regional Observatories, which is one of the outstanding results of the project and one of the "pillars" on which the sustainability of benefits produced by SMART_watch is based.

Partners first clarified the overarching concepts for a network and agreed on functions, structures, and procedures.

Then, by involving directly key actors, stakeholders and the observatories themselves in two workshops, partners developed an operational model for the network and fed it with contents.

Tools and devices for supporting the network implementation and activities were identified and described.

Eventually, the functioning roles and organs of the network were brought out and the enrolling procedure was precised. The networking stage brought to the identification and involvement of more than one hundred ROs in seven Central Europe countries.
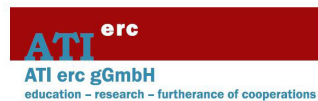
Partners

CONTACTS Email: smart_watch@gapr.pl

www.interreg-central.eu/Content.Node/SMART-watch.html
smartspecialisation.tech

@regionalobservatories

Interreg SMART_watch

PH CREDITS unsplash.com
www.pexels.com
SMART_watch partners