

# SMART SPECIALISATION APPROACH

Nikola Radovanovic  
European Training Foundation



23/06/2026



# What is Smart Specialisation?

## Design

**ANALYSIS:** Discover the socio-economic and innovation engines of regional growth, competitive advantages & weaknesses

**GOVERNANCE:** Develop process in an inclusive and interactive process centred on entrepreneurial discovery

**SHARED VISION:** Define jointly what innovation is and what it is supposed to achieve

**PRIORITISE:** Identify a limited set of priorities to concentrate investments

**POLICY MIX:** Choose right set of instruments to achieve objectives

**MONITORING AND EVALUATION:** Feed information back into the policy cycle to allow strategy revision

## Implementation

**EDP:** Manage stakeholder relations & keep them alive

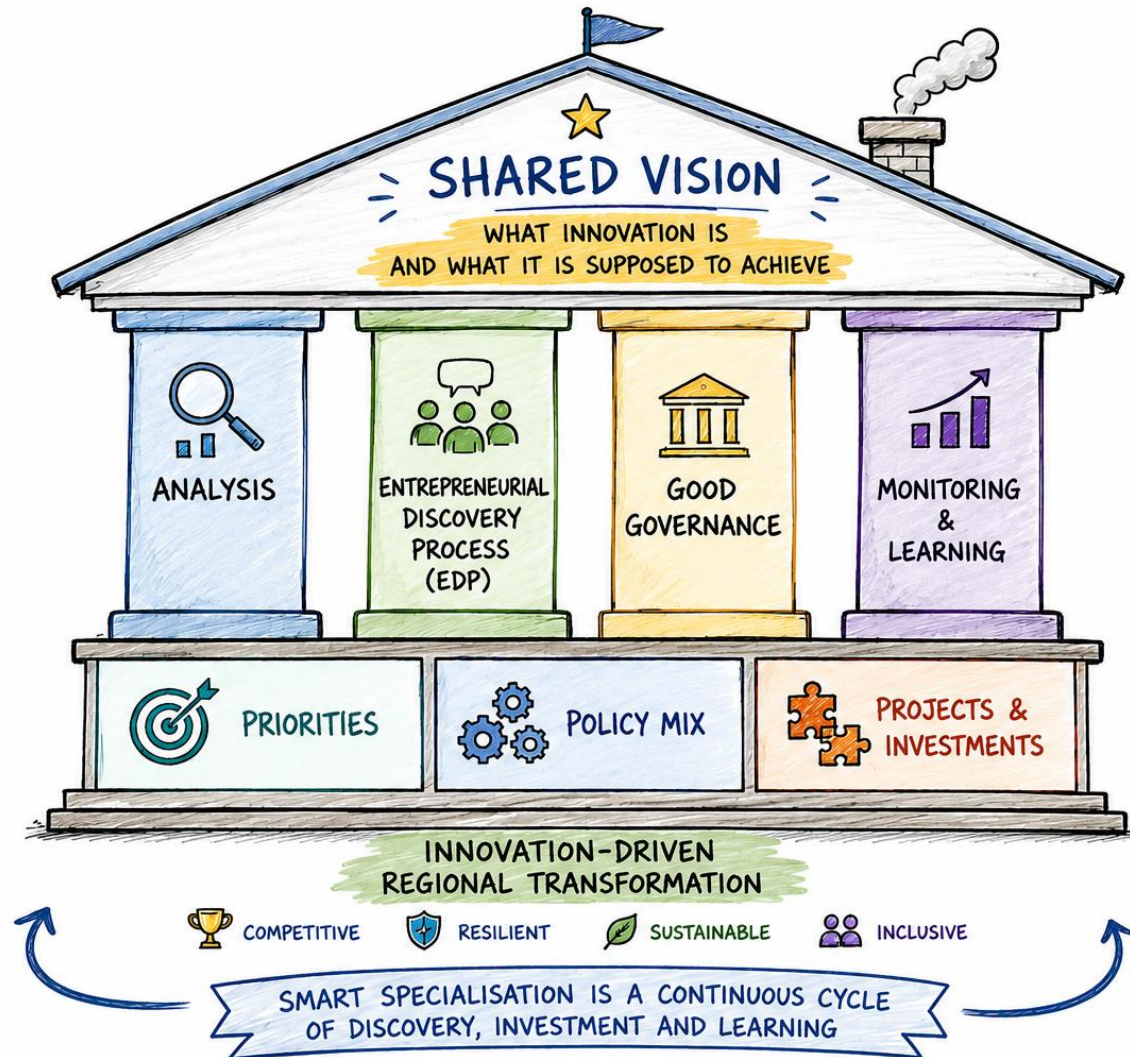
**GOOD GOVERNANCE:** Structures & arrangements

**P2P:** Translate priorities into project portfolios (selection criteria & selection mechanism)

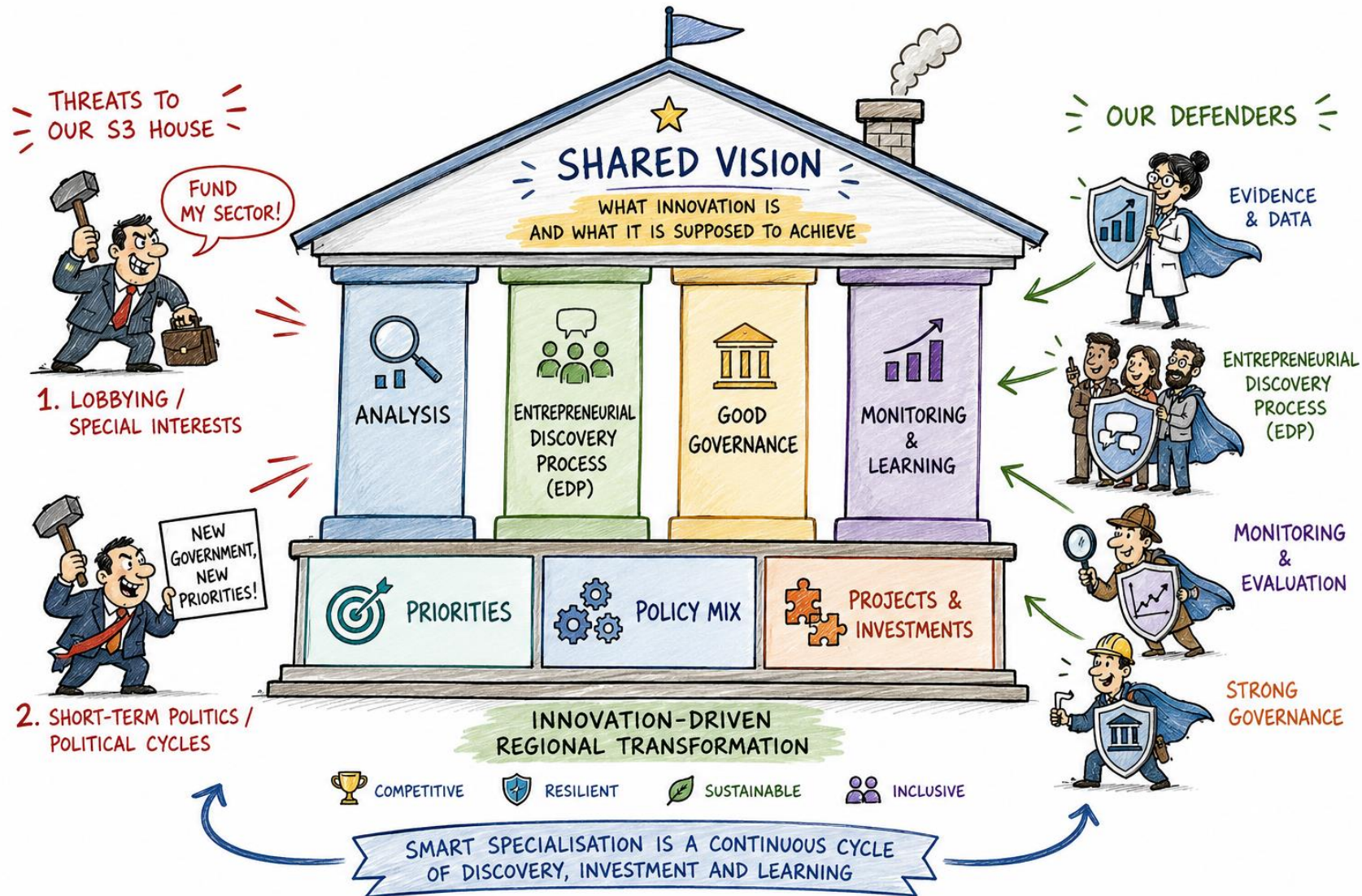
**TRANSNATIONAL VALUE CHAINS**

**MONITOR**

# Smart Specialisation



# Smart Specialisation in reality



# Smart Specialisation design framework for the EU E&N region



INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING



MAPPING EXERCISE



ENTREPRENEURIAL DISCOVERY  
PROCESS

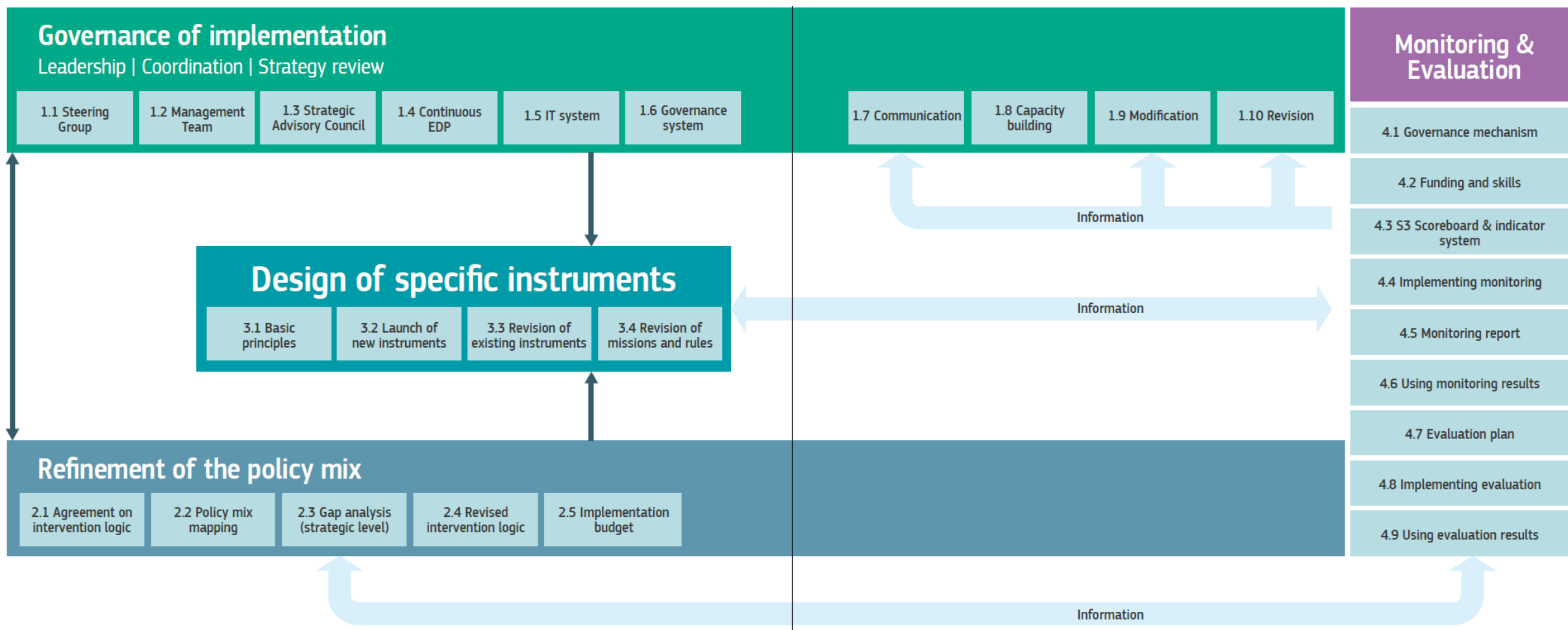


INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR  
IMPLEMENTATION

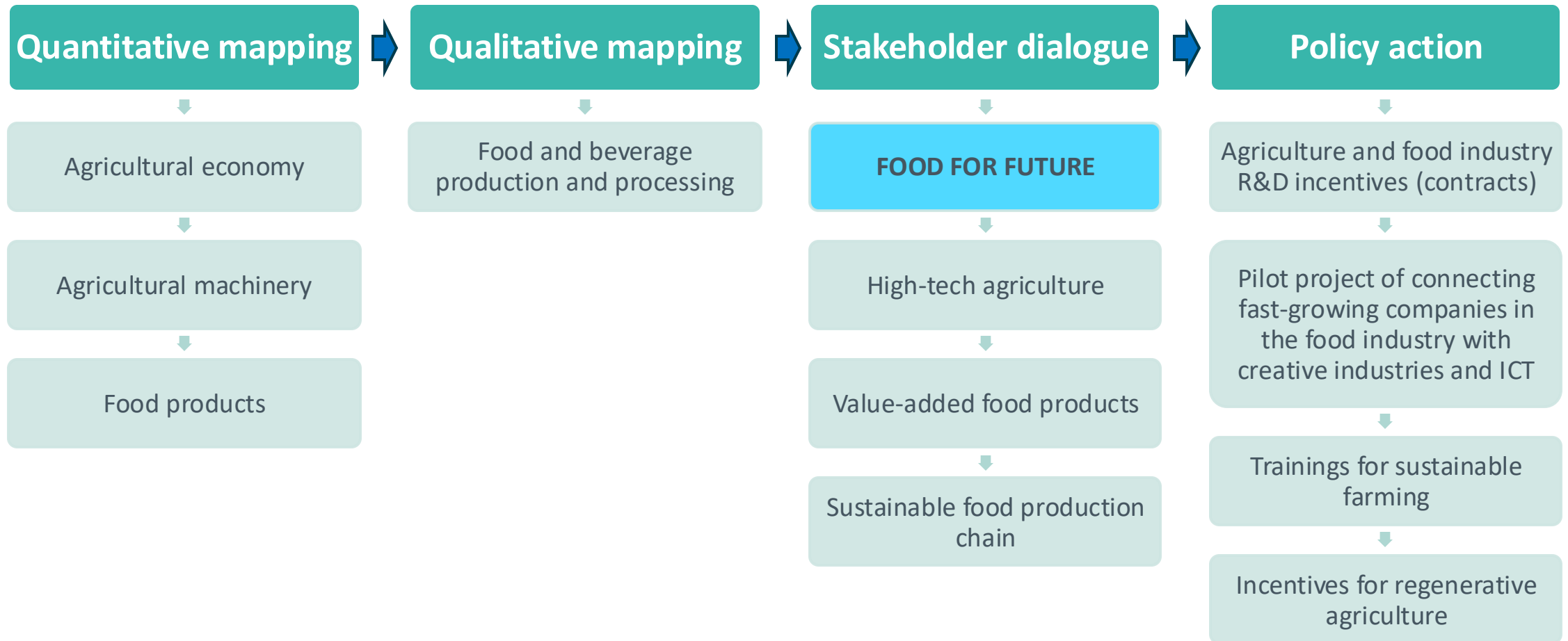


FINAL S3 STRATEGY

# Smart Specialisation implementation framework for the EU E&N region



# S3 priority roadmap – example from Serbia



# EDP as the crucial step of S3

- Standard topics (SWOT, policy vision, policy mix)
- Priority and sub-priority based, cross-priority potential
- References to societal and sustainability challenges (green, digital transition, just transition)



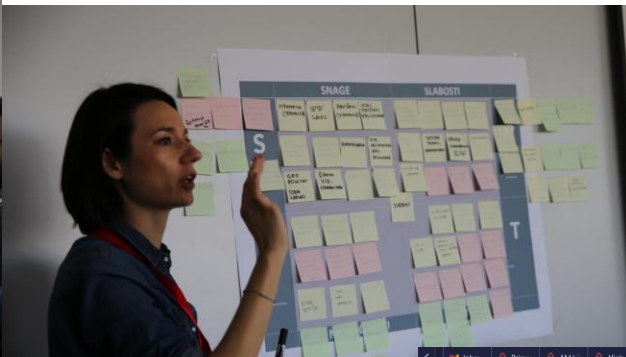
## Main prerequisites:

- Defined working groups per priorities
- Attributed workshop coordination responsibilities
- Defined plan of workshops, agendas and scenarios
- Preparation and distribution of materials to stakeholders
- Technical requirements met

## Workshop type:

- Face-2-face vs. online vs. hybrid
- Regional vs. national perspective

# EDP in the EU enlargement region



Recording

## Key take-aways

- The EU (and WB) scenarios
  - ICT is an umbrella term (innumerable technologies are part of it and the "hot" ones change across time)
  - ICT is a General Purpose Technology (productivity increases in all industries after adoption)
  - ICT is a pervasive concept, related to the pathway towards an information and knowledge-based society
  - ICT can be a driver of industrial transition, also by the introduction of new industries that did not exist before
  - ICT exists as a priority (with a wide variety of sub-priorities) in most EU S3 in 2014-2020
- The MNE scenario
  - An ongoing process towards making Montenegro an information and knowledge-based society
  - ICT recognised as related to infrastructure, but also education and skills of the population
  - ICT as a horizontal priority in S3 2019-2024 with limited funding
  - My question: can your scientific excellence in some academic fields, including ICT, plus the low cost of labour, plus the skills of your people (which can always be increased), plus a clear S3 direction (which one?) ensure industrial transition through the creation of a niche sector or cluster, attractive enough for foreign companies?
- Three implementation dilemmas
  - Is the approach based on flagship initiatives appropriate to the funding limitations?
  - How wise is to forget about involving non-MNE partners in funded initiatives?
  - Ok to be mostly application-focused, but what about R&D in ICT "core" technologies?

Participants (36)

- Nikola Radovanovic(Me)
- Mirastarivo Naskelhost
- Francesco Molinar(Co-host)
- Goran Subotic
- Nikolina Sturanovic
- Vujask Dragana NTP CG
- Milena Milorijic
- Jasna Mladicovic
- Jelena Radenovic
- Veljkor Boskovic\_Montenegro
- Armin Alibasic (UDG)
- Alessia
- Snezana Scapanovic
- Natasa Vujovic
- Stevan Cakic
- Nebojsa Nalickovic
- Milan Maric
- Magdalena Florek
- Ana Niles Radovic
- Dragan Cabarkapa

# Smart Specialisation in the Western Balkans

Smart Specialisation priorities					
ME	RS	MK	AL	XK*	BA
Sustainable agriculture and food value chain	Food for future	Agriculture and food processing with high added value	Healthy and Sustainable Food Chain	Agrifood processing	Production and processing of food and beverage
Innovative, regenerative and sustainable tourism	Future machines and manufacturing systems	Electrical equipment and mechanical parts	Sustainable and Diversified Tourism	Creative industry	Production and processing of plastics
Energy and sustainable development	Creative industry	Smart/sustainable buildings and materials	Renewable Energy and Natural Resources	Green energy	Wood industry
ICT and digital innovation	ICT	ICT	Digitalisation and connectivity	ICT	ICT
Nature and human-centered construction			Human Capital Development	Wood processing industry	Metal and electrical industry
			Support R&I		Tourism

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

# S3 stakeholder networks in the EU enlargement region

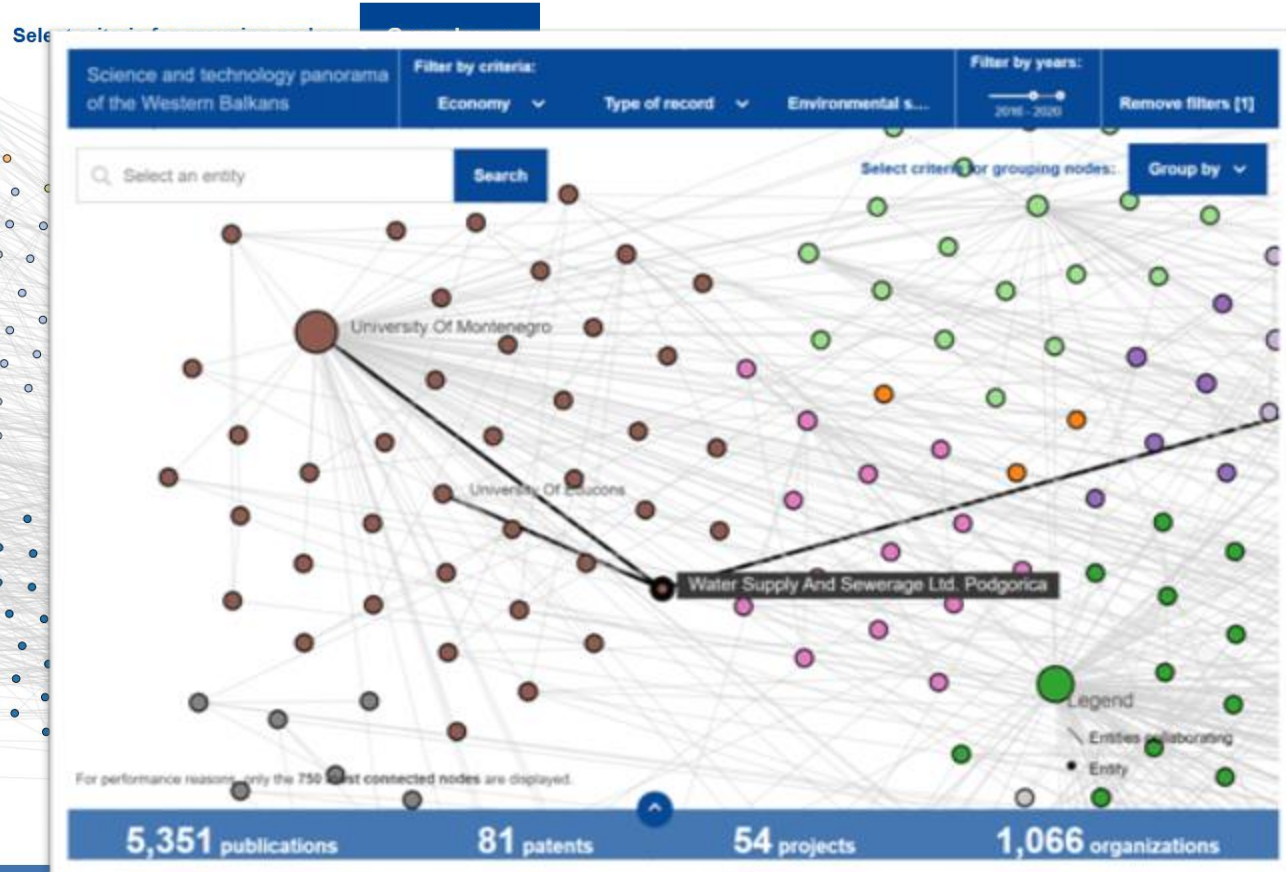
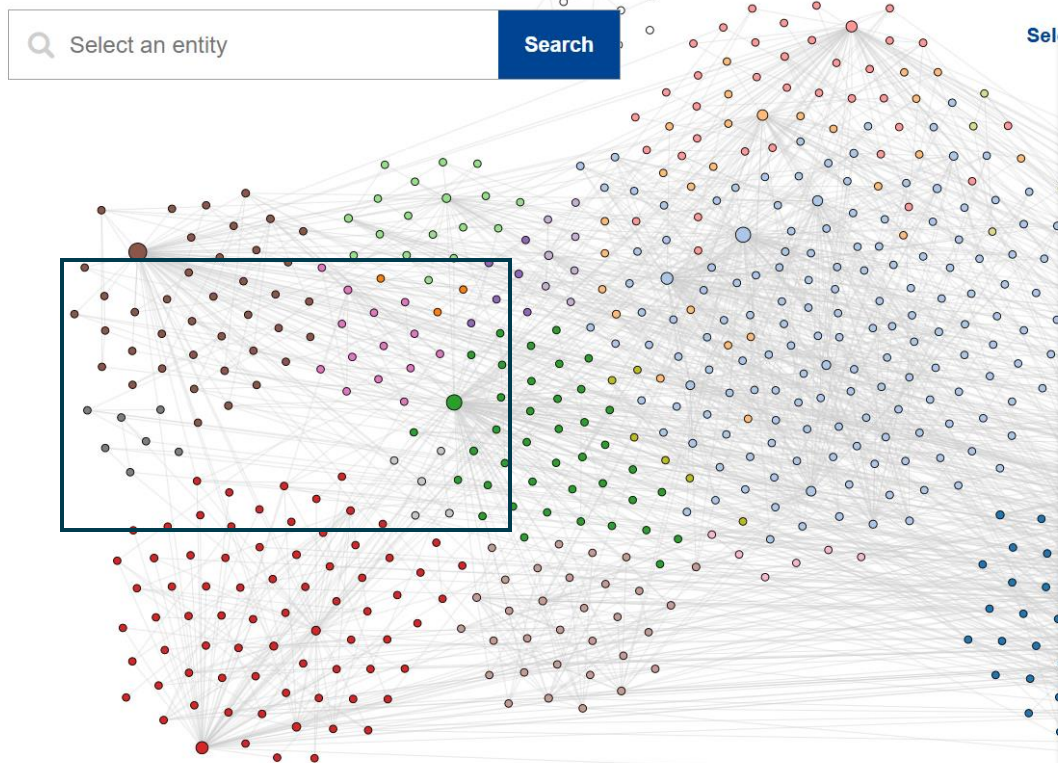
Science and technology panorama of the Western Balkans

Filter by criteria: Economy ▼ Type of record ▼ Environmental s...

Filter by years: 2016 - 2020

Remove filters [1]

Source: <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/wb-s3-collaboration-networks>

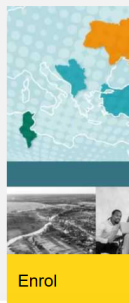


For performance reasons, only the 750 most connected nodes are displayed.

# Online sources on S3

## Smart Specialisation in EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region and the new trends in the Smart Specialisation approach

One day Novice



<https://academy.europa.eu/courses/smart-specialisation-in-eu-enlargement-and-neighbourhood-region-and-the-new-trends-in-the-smart-specialisation-approach>

### Course details

The MOOC analyses the main phases of the design of a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) considering the specificity of each territory. The MOOC includes 7 modules covering the guidance and methodological approach, as well as practical examples from the Enlargement and Neighbouring region. The MOOC draws from the research of the Research Centre in the promotion of the Smart Specialisation Framework in the Neighbourhood Region.

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/skilling-western-balkans-agri-food-sector-digitalising-greening>

## Skilling up the Western Balkans agri-food sector: digitalising, greening

### Project context

- The ETF supports anchoring **smart specialisation** priorities in agri-food in a realistic supply of relevant skills – in particular at medium and high levels.
- The ETF looks at skills from an agri-food **SME standpoint**. It facilitates networking among companies and those who seek to develop concrete solutions to support skills development for innovation, growth and competitiveness.
- The ETF's work is closely linked with the **green and digital transitions** that are transforming the agri-food sector by raising competitive pressures and corresponding skills needs of companies.
- The ETF's project 'Skilling up the Western Balkan agri-food sector: digitalising, greening' was designed to enhance **joined-up skills development** among a broad range of Western Balkan stakeholders and their European peers. The ETF actions directly contribute to the Acquis Chapter 25, Science and Research.
- The **collaboration on skilling, upskilling and reskilling** that we, the ETF, facilitate prepares the ecosystems to make the most of the opportunities offered by the EU's sectoral, business support frameworks and financial instruments.

<https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/what-we-do/skills-enterprise-development>

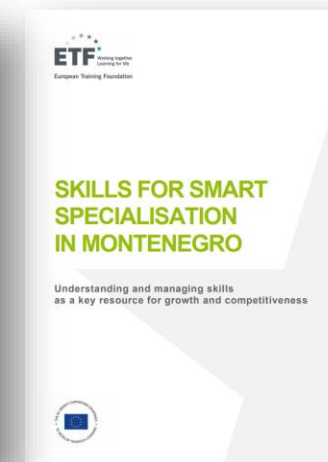


## Skills for enterprise development

The ETF's initiative Skills for Enterprise Development (S4E) focuses on providing high-quality support in linking vocational education and training (VET) and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) for innovation, productivity-enhancing skills, and quality of work.

### Skills for smart specialisation in Albania

In 2024, the ETF carried out a targeted analysis at the request of the Albanian Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) team, focusing on the technology and skills needs within the country's priority domains for smart specialisation. The objective was to formulate recommendations for skills development that can support the accelerated growth of these priority sectors, particularly in the context of Albania's preparation for entry into the EU single market.



# S3 Observatory

## Knowledge Hub: Smart Specialisation in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region

A dedicated space with region-wide and country-specific analyses, online tools and methodological guidelines.

[https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/territorial-development/innovation-eu-enlargement-and-neighbourhood-region/s3-knowledge-hub\\_en](https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/projects-and-activities/territorial-development/innovation-eu-enlargement-and-neighbourhood-region/s3-knowledge-hub_en)



[https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/assets/s3-observatory/index\\_en.html](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/assets/s3-observatory/index_en.html)

## S3 THEMATIC PLATFORMS



# Why Smart Specialisation matters for vocational excellence

- **Smart Specialisation is guiding regional economic transformation**
- **Identifies priority domains for innovation and economic development**
- **Aligns investments in innovation, skills, competitiveness, digital and green transition**
- **Already widely used in EU Member States and increasingly in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region**
- **Skills shortages and mismatches repeatedly emerge as major bottlenecks during S3 implementation**
- **VET providers, especially CoVEs, can help translate innovation priorities into workforce capabilities and institutional capacity**

# Smart Specialisation methodology



## ANALYSIS



INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING



MAPPING EXERCISE



ENTREPRENEURIAL DISCOVERY PROCESS  
(STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE)



INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR  
IMPLEMENTATION

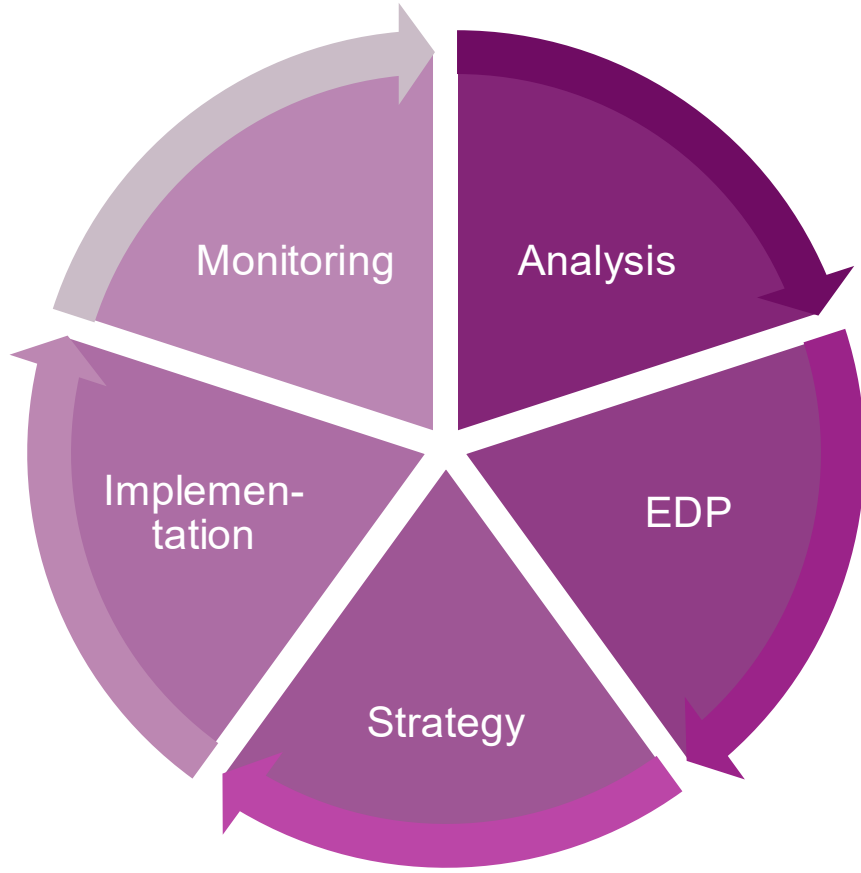


FINAL S3 STRATEGY



IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVISION

# Where CoVEs fit in the S3 cycle



Phase	Potential CoVE contribution
Analysis	Skills intelligence, labour market evidence
EDP	Participation in stakeholder dialogue
Strategy	Validation of skills implications of priorities
Implementation	Training, reskilling, SME support, applied innovation
Monitoring	Feedback on emerging skills needs and labour market change

# Key messages

- **Skills and human capital are often the missing link between innovation priorities and economic transformation**
- **Implementing Smart Specialisation without addressing skills shortages decreases its value**
- **Smart Specialisation is not just a strategy document; it is a continuous process of discovery and prioritisation**
- **VET providers, and especially CoVEs, can become key ecosystem actors by connecting education, innovation and business needs throughout the S3 cycle**

# Thank you

nikola.radovanovic@etf.europa.eu

 [www.etf.europa.eu](http://www.etf.europa.eu)

 <https://bsky.app/profile/etf.europa.eu>

 [youtube.com/user/etfeuropa](https://youtube.com/user/etfeuropa)

 [www.facebook.com/etfeuropa](https://www.facebook.com/etfeuropa)

 [www.instagram.com/etfeuropa](https://www.instagram.com/etfeuropa)

 [openspace.etf.europa.eu](https://openspace.etf.europa.eu)

 <https://www.linkedin.com/companyetfeuropa>