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EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



TRANSFORM

**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO TRANSFORMING REGIONAL
R&I SYSTEMS TOWARDS RRI**

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INTRODUCTION

TRANSFORM project provides regional public authorities and other interested R&I actors with inspiring examples and practical suggestions, emerging from real regional settings and experimentations, on [how to implement RRI principles through sound methodologies to engage citizens and multiple stakeholders](#).

This Policy Brief outlines recommendations for policymakers committed to transforming regional R&I systems towards RRI by implementing participatory approaches. These recommendations are grounded in the [lessons learned by project partners in implementing the three cluster activities](#) (Lombardy – Italy; Catalonia - Spain; Brussels-Capital Region - Belgium), shared learning, and monitoring actions. Each of the regions participating in TRANSFORM has experimented with different participatory methodologies that, as expected, have had an effect on other parts of their R&I regional governance structure.

In Lombardy, three partners ([Bassetti Foundation](#) – cluster leader -, [Lombardy Region](#), and [Finlombarda](#)) worked together to implement a participatory research agenda-setting exercise whose primary purpose is to identify, together with the community involved (participatory), the priorities that should guide the policy planning (agenda setting) in the field of research and innovation (research). TRANSFORM in Lombardy has structured its process mainly using deliberative methods. In public deliberation for policy making, a small group of citizens, typically selected through a random selection plus stratification, meet, learn, discuss, and elaborate collective recommendations on a specific pre-selected issue to be delivered to the decision-makers who commission the deliberative process.

In Catalonia, three partners ([Science for Change](#) - cluster leader -the Catalan Government ([Generalitat de Catalunya](#)), and the research group [OpenSystems from the University of Barcelona](#) -

worked together to implement a citizen science exercise. Citizen science is a way of doing science in which citizens are invited to participate in one or multiple phases of the scientific process, from the definition of the research question to the analysis of results, including the choice of method and the data collection. On the one hand, this ensures that scientific projects are linked to social needs, and on the other, it increases citizens' knowledge of and trust in science.

In the Brussels-Capital region, three partners ([BE participation asbl](#) – cluster leader -, [Innoviris](#) and [UCLouvain](#)) worked together to implement multi-stakeholder engagement processes around various types of innovations, including citizen-led ones, related to the field of the circular economy. Pilot activities have involved mostly citizens but also representatives of the private sector, public authorities, and scientific experts through carefully facilitated participatory sessions, making use of approaches similar to focus groups. Such activities have aimed to harness collective intelligence around innovations in the making, to better address societal needs, and to provide a deep understanding of complex (and often conflictual) ecosystems, where both private and citizens-led innovations compete over a standard stream of resources and funding, by exploring common ground and shared solutions.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Citizen engagement, as a critical component of territorial RRI, can be a successful tool to improve regional public policies on research and innovation by bringing different experiences and ideas to the table at various stages of the policy cycle and often achieving results beyond expectations. The evidence stemmed from the actions in the three regional clusters involved in TRANSFORM.

Lombardy

In Spring 2021, around 1020 people living in Lombardy contributed to shaping regional R&I through a structured [participatory research and innovation agenda-setting exercise](#). The process was held entirely online (due to the COVID-19 restrictions), combining a survey administered to a representative sample of the Lombardy population (targeting personal and territorial needs) and a deliberative workshop on just energy transition for all in Lombardy.

In June 2022, a face-to-face [Citizens' Jury](#) engaged 24 Lombardy citizens - selected according to specific socio-demographics criteria - to learn, discuss, and deliberate about regional Responsible Smart Mobility, one of the critical themes of [Lombardy Smart Specialization Strategy \(S3\)](#). Jurors provided Lombardy Region with recommendations on inserting responsibility issues like privacy and profiling, digital and economic inclusion, and accessibility when designing regional policies in this field.

The actions and the outcomes of the entire process were described in the regional portal [Open Innovation](#) and presented in a [public event](#).

Thanks to TRANSFORM, regional S3 (2021-2027) has set participatory governance as one of the main challenges for the region. The strategy explicitly mentions the TRANSFORM experience and dedicates an entire chapter to RRI principles.

Outcomes from the survey and the deliberative workshop supported Lombardy Region in identifying territorial and citizens' needs that are at the basis of the regional [Three Years Strategic Program on Research, Innovation, and Technological Transfer \(2021-2023\)](#).

Collective recommendations stemming from [the Citizens' Jury](#) informed a call for funding to develop smart data-driven mobility services. Citizens' recommendations have been inserted as requirements for applicants to reflect and act in designing their proposals. Lombardy Region committed to taking into account the Jurors' suggestions in the second stage of the call (in 2023) and its strategic documents and actions on smart mobility in the near future.

Catalonia

The first activity consisted of the setting up of a Think Tank, with 47 members of the R&I ecosystem, to increase knowledge on RRI and citizen science and co-design two citizen science pilots to tackle socioenvironmental challenges.

Then, the pilots were developed.

The [waste pilot](#) was intended to contribute to the improvement of the selective collection system in the municipality of Mollet del Vallès (Barcelona). To this end, a digital game called Dilemma-R was co-designed and used as a citizen science tool involving secondary school students.

The [health pilot](#) was intended to contribute to the improvement of clinical approaches and health services to the disease endometriosis. To this end, a group of patients was set up to deepen their experiences and co-create recommendations for health professionals and policymakers. From a local point of view, both pilots have generated results that have been taken into account by the competent local authorities when designing policies, now more aligned with social needs. From the regional point of view, the pilots have encouraged RRI and citizen science to be integrated into RIS3CAT 2030, and some of the funding programmes developed within this framework ([Shared Agendas](#), [Regions of Knowledge Programme](#), [Public Procurement program for innovation](#)). Also, Think Tank members (both those participating in the implementation of the pilots and those not) have increased their knowledge of RRI and citizen science and learned firsthand about the practical benefits of applying citizen science in R&I projects.

Brussels-Capital

Two types of pilots have been implemented between March 2021 and October 2022 to inspire the regional partner Innoviris to embed further participatory processes within its R&I management and funding processes. BE participation asbl, the cluster leader, has led [a pilot focused on the issue of unsold food](#). Over one hundred individuals, including citizens and civil society organisations, private companies, researchers, and representatives of local public authorities, have joined a series of participatory workshops. Participants have first discussed separately, by stakeholder groups, the issues at stake around the current management of unsold food in the region, its environmental impacts, and various aspects of food aid initiatives. Finally, all stakeholders have been brought together to identify common ground, share ideas, and show public authorities the visible benefits of such processes.

UCLouvain has conducted two more pilots, partially in collaboration with BE participation, focused on introducing citizen engagement processes in university-led innovations developed by students. Ideas for making [innovative water sensors](#) and a newly created sustainable food have been introduced to over fifty citizens through a design thinking approach. The process led to the identification of aspects that can help innovators in university programmes better address societal needs.

The TRANSFORM pilots have brought together local actors to show how multi-stakeholder engagement can be key to identifying common ground and shared ideas and provide public funders with a better understanding of the potential impacts of R&I initiatives they support. Further Brussels-Capital regional authorities beyond Innoviris have expressed interest in the pilots' methodological approach, such as the newly created special unit on participatory democracy within Brussels' public agency Perspective.

Brussels Pilots have also paved the way for follow-up activities that build on the potential of participatory activities. For example, a Belgian private foundation active in the field of food aid is interested in supporting further co-design and co-creation activities to advance in the unsold food field. At the same time, a future European project will exploit the TRANSFORM multi-stakeholder engagement methodology on a bigger scale within regional developments toward climate neutrality.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The participatory experiences and mutual learning process within and among the three regions engaged in TRANSFORM provide several considerations of utility for policymakers.

From Lombardy

- High-quality deliberative processes require time and a clear focus. A careful plan is important to guarantee the effectiveness and actionability of the outcomes.
- The civic lottery is the golden standard to recruit citizens, but public authorities need to have procedures in place to implement it. Before embarking on such processes, explore what is implementable, taking into account relevant features of citizens' engagement (i.e., rewarding citizens taking part).
- Communications before, in between, and after the events in person with citizens are fundamental for a transparent process and for building trust between the public and commissioning institutions. Setting up a virtual space as a repository of all the material used, practical information, and results are important, like the process itself.
- Collective recommendations can also be a way to read regional societal perceptions, attitudes, and awareness about specific issues and can help to prevent potential innovation controversies.
- Discuss the quality and the implementation of the process with those who took part in it, starting from the institution which initiated the process but also involving the citizens participating in. Reserve specific time for evaluation with all the actors in the process.

From Catalonia

- To develop citizen science projects with real transformative potential in the territory, the involvement of the competent authorities from the beginning and the co-design of the project is key.
- The design and implementation of citizen science projects within a multi-stakeholder working scheme require a change in mindset and practices, developing greater flexibility, resilience, mutual trust, and active listening.
- Defining a common goal and creating a shared language is key to the success of the process.
- Involving different stakeholders in projects can lead to uncertainties or changes during the course of the project, and is advisable to be open to this. Conversely, it also makes it possible for unexpected opportunities to arise.
- Engaging citizens is a complex and laborious process that requires specific strategies and time, especially to comply with the premise of inclusiveness that is part of the spirit of citizen science.

From Brussels-Capital

- When multi-stakeholder engagement processes are lacking in a territory, this can result in innovations being supported by public agencies without a general understanding of the local ecosystem and without promoting and supporting collaborations.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement can be used to manage crises, such as the complexity of growing initiatives around unsold food, but ideally, when implemented regularly. At an early stage, it allows regional governments to support (open) innovation better oriented to local needs.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement can be implemented in an agile way without requiring a lot of time or resources, in particular when supported by public authorities. Experienced facilitators should be involved in planning and leading the process.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement generates high expectations in all participants involved. It should never be performed as an exercise in itself, and it should lead to concrete changes.

What clearly emerged from our whole project experience is that territorial RRI and good public participation require appropriate skills and tools. However, a general observation throughout our work is that methods and tools are not enough. It is at least essential to have a deep knowledge of the regional R&I ecosystem and its actors. Regional RRI requires careful consideration of regional

needs and concerns, and that one builds together on existing structures and relationships. To innovate responsibly is also a matter of caring for what is already there of value in the institutions and communities in a long-term perspective.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LEGACY

Best practices, emerging from the citizen engagement actions introduced in the three regions are described in 3 Strategic Roadmaps for the implementation of RRI within S3, which detail the activities implemented in TRANSFORM:

- *Strategic Roadmaps for the implementation and support of territorial RRI through Participatory Research Agenda-setting within S3 priorities - Lombardy Cluster.*
- *Strategic Roadmaps for the implementation and support of territorial RRI through Citizen Science within S3 priorities - Catalonia Cluster.*
- *Strategic Roadmaps for the implementation and support of territorial RRI through Multi-stakeholder Engagement within S3 priorities – Brussels-Capital Region Cluster.*

TRANSFORM also developed Executive Summaries of the three Roadmaps ([Lombardy Cluster](#), [Catalonia Cluster](#), [Brussel-Capital Region Cluster](#)) to encourage policymakers further and all interested stakeholders to explore citizen engagement approaches in the context of S3.

Furthermore, the *TRANSFORM e-book* presents the experimentation processes explored in the three regional clusters and other project activities (shared learning activities, monitoring and evaluation), also collecting links to reports and multi-media materials. The [e-book](#) is an easy-to-use guide for policymakers and other stakeholders to implement RRI and participatory approaches in the context of S3.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

TRANSFORM brought together three European regions – Lombardy (Italy), Brussels-Capital (Belgium) and Catalonia (Spain) – to adapt to local contexts, test and disseminate sound co-design and co-creation methodological frameworks (participatory research agenda setting, citizen science, design thinking for social innovation and multi-stakeholder engagement approaches) within their Smart Specialisation Strategies (S3). These frameworks provided approaches and application areas of responsible and accountable territorial development through new forms of local decision-making. Regional governments involved in TRANSFORM reflected on, experimented with, learned from and adopted RRI approaches to their R&I policies and actions. The three implementing regions also engaged in mutual learning within and beyond Europe, pairing with a co-design initiative in Boston (USA) and in capacity building exercises with experts in citizen engagement methodologies, RRI, and S3 (i.e., TRANSFORM Advisory Board members).

Concrete examples of inclusive and sustainable territorial development have been attained, thus providing a set of reliable Policy Recommendations to transforming regional R&I ecosystems towards RRI.

TRANSFORM contributed to:

- Establish more open, transparent and democratic R&I ecosystems in Europe;
- Consolidate Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation by integrating an RRI approach within existing regional innovation processes;
- Empower diverse stakeholders to implement and/or engage with the development of responsible regional development processes and evaluate their impact;
- Explore concrete R&I working methods based on three sound methodological approaches: participatory research agenda-setting, citizen science and design-thinking for social innovation;

- Advance territorial Responsible Research and Innovation by promoting shared learning and diffusion of governance innovations.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	Territories as Responsive and Accountable Networks of S3 through new Forms of Open and Responsible Decision-Making (TRANSFORM)
COORDINATOR	Angela Simone, Fondazione Giannino Bassetti, Milano, Italy, angela.simone@fondazionebassetti.org .
CONSORTIUM	Association Européenne pour l'Information sur le Développement Local – AEIDL – Brussels, Belgium Departament de la Vicepresidència i d'Economia i Hisenda - Generalitat de Catalunya – GENCAT – Barcelona, Spain Finanziaria per lo Sviluppo della Lombardia – Finlombarda – Milan, Italy Fondazione Giannino Bassetti – FGB – Milan, Italy INNOVIRIS – Brussels, Belgium Museum of Science – MoS – Boston, United States Plateforme belge pour la participation citoyenne – BE participation ASBL – Brussels, Belgium Regione Lombardia – RL – Milan, Italy Science for Change – SfC – Barcelona, Spain Universitetet i Bergen – UiB – Bergen, Norway Universitat de Barcelona – Barcelona, Spain Université catholique de Louvain – Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
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