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## **D4.1.2 - HEInnovate for RIS3 Framework (RE-ACT framework for regional collaboration)**



# RE-ACT

**Self-reflection Tools for Smart  
Universities Acting Regionally**

## D4.1.2 – HEInnovate for RIS3 framework

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## Introduction

This document provides an overview of the methodology applied in the European project RE-ACT – Self-reflection tools for smart universities acting regionally. The methodology is described step-by-step for the replication of the RE-ACT approach and processes, through the effective use of the results produced by the project and the takeaways gathered from participants' experience.

The RE-ACT project aims at unleashing the potential of the originally defined “HEINNOVATE for RIS3”, namely the process of promotion of collaboration among regional actors for regional innovation and the tool, supporting HEIs to rethink and reposition their strategies, structures and actions through a holistic approach to innovation and entrepreneurship, regionally embedded and supported by collaborative links among key actors of the triple/ quadruple helix.

## Starting point

The following picture (Fig. 1) illustrates the steps proposed by RE-ACT for HEIs and other regional stakeholders to assess and enhance their added value in terms of regional development.

The steps and components of the RE-ACT approach were developed and tested during the two years and a half of the project implementation, including a thorough research phase with a series of activities during which actors of the triple/quadruple helix in each project partner country were involved.

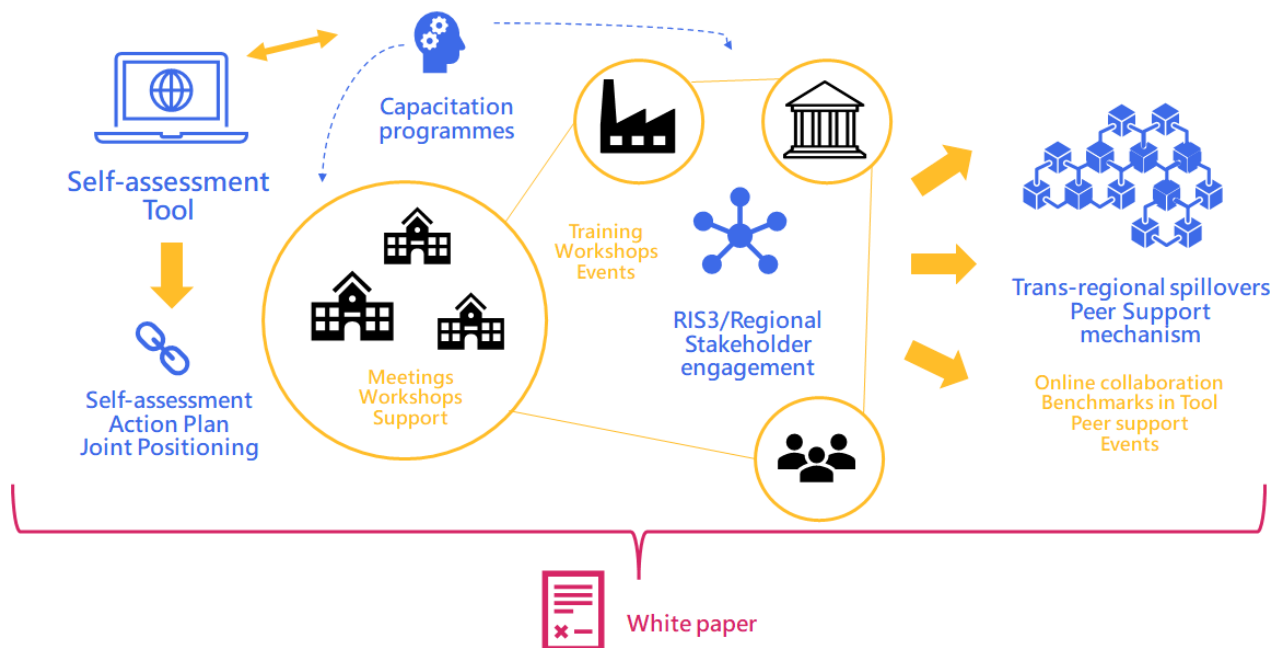


FIGURE 1 - RE-ACT FRAMEWORK FOR REGIONAL COLLABORATION

The main output of the project was to develop and test a new online self-reflection tool built-on HEInnovate, exploring its added value in the framework of RIS3 and overall regional development.

## From HEInnovate to HEInnovate for RIS3

HEInnovate is a self-reflection tool for Higher Education Institutions who wish to explore their entrepreneurial and innovative potential. It guides one through a process of identification, prioritisation and action planning in eight key areas (dimensions).

On the basis of this tool, the RE-ACT project proposed to build the new tool HEInnovate for RIS3/SUNAR. The innovative idea of the project was linking the HEInnovate approach of entrepreneurial universities with the design and implementation of RIS3 into one comprehensible product. Incremental innovations considered the introduction of additional practical exercises for knowledge exchange in a cross-sectional setting on RIS3 topics, or in incorporating, adapting and validating RE-ACT contents in interactive moments during regional RIS3 events.

Therefore, the tool “HEInnovate for RIS3” (now designated as “SUNAR - Smart Universities Acting Regionally - Self-Assessment Tool” as explained later on in this chapter), developed by RE-ACT, aims to complement the HEInnovate tool by integrating statements dedicated to the Research and Innovation Strategy for Smart Specialisation (RIS3). However, it can also be used as an independent self-standing tool (i.e. there is not an absolute requirement to use the HEInnovate before using the RE-ACT/SUNAR tool) to assess the regional engagement and embeddedness of HEIs.

Regarding the name of the self-assessment tool, the initial name that was given, HEInnovate for RIS3, was based on the existing HEInnovate tool. Near the end of the project partners decided to change the name of the tool to: SUNAR – Smart UNiversities Acting Regionally.

At the basis of this decision there were several reasons:

1. After some informal discussions with the representatives from the European Commission and the Technopolis Group to share the project results, the consortium decided to differentiate the name of the tool from the original one, since the RE-ACT tool is specifically addressing RIS3 related content. Anyway, the same dimensions were kept and HEInnovate platform will contain a link to the SUNAR tool.
2. Even though the consortium provided training courses to introduce complex concepts such as RIS3 and HEInnovate, that are available on the projects' webpage there are and might be several potential users that are not familiar with these concepts. Thus, the name change has the additional objective to make the tool more accessible to the regional stakeholders that are not/less confident with the above mentioned concepts.

In order to design and create the tool, the project activities started by an extensive research analysis including questionnaires, interviews and workshops addressed to organisations leading RIS3 processes at the regional and/or national level as well as to RIS3 and HEInnovate experts. This phase investigated the pivotal role HEIs play in innovation-driven regional development, the added value of self-assessment tools and lessons learned during 2014-2020 in the involved regions/countries. The insights from this step led to the design of the SUNAR tool.

The self-assessment tool of RE-ACT supports HEIs to perform a self-assessment that will kick-off both an internal analysis – translated into organisational action plans – and a collective debate between HEIs from the same region, as well as between HEIs and other actors from the triple/quadruple helix – towards the agreement upon a joint positioning and regarding the improvement of HEIs regional engagement.

Based on the concept of collaboration between the different nodes of the the triple/quadruple helix, this tool allows HEIs to undergo a process of self-reflection and assess their contribution to RIS3, helping them to understand, among other issues, how well they fulfill their mission and reach out to others.

Although the tool SUNAR is primarily targeted at HEIs, it includes several statements that explore the interactions of each HEI with other stakeholders. The self-assessment consists in choosing a score for each statement.

Another element of novelty introduced by the RE-ACT project is the fact that the tool was tested and used also by other key actors from the regional innovation ecosystem that could also self-reflect on HEIs contribution to RIS3.

SUNAR can help HEIs to:

- Assess their current active engagement in the regional ecosystem and contribution for policy development;
- Lead HEIs to revise their strategies, structures and practices;
- From vision to action: support HEIs in becoming regionally embedded entrepreneurial smart universities;
- Debate and agree upon a joint positioning for HEIs as regional asset;
- Engage all the key actors of the triple/quadruple helix and underpin a profound collaborative work among for RIS3 design, revision, implementation and monitoring;
- Offer peer support to quadruple helix networks from other regions, strengthening HEIS in their pivotal roles in igniting, cherishing and sustaining innovation.

The tool is available at the following link: <https://sunar.pbs.up.pt/>.

The following figure (Fig. 2) shows an overview of the tool:

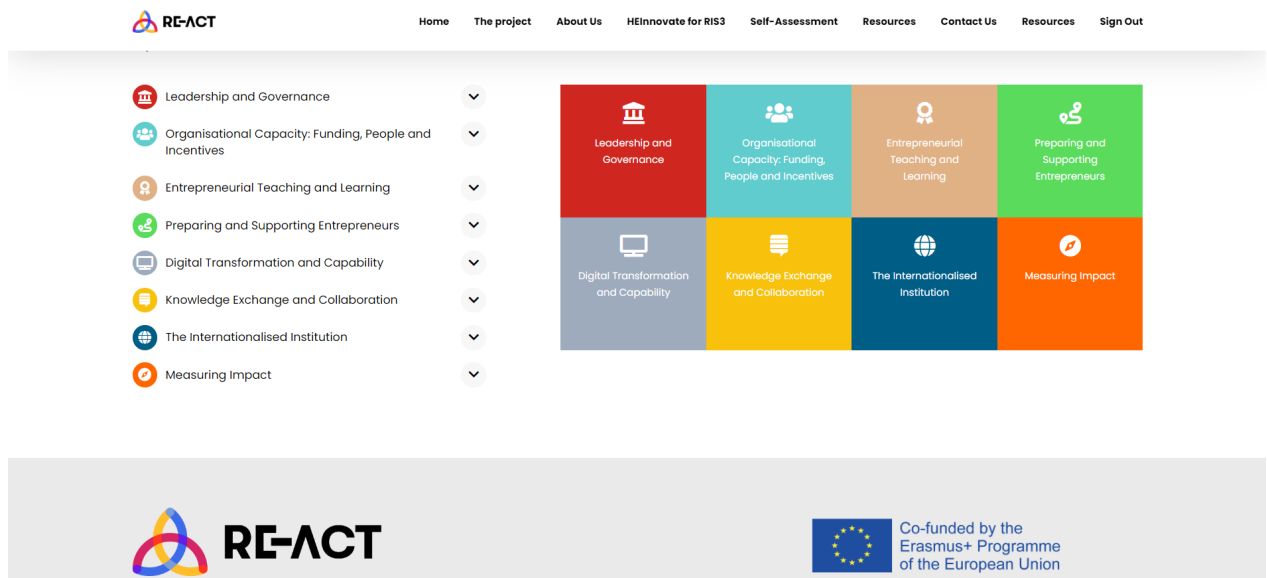


FIGURE 2 - SUNAR TOOL – SMART UNIVERSITIES ACTING REGIONALLY

### Description of the tool

The self-assessment is carried out along 8 dimensions:

1. Leadership and Governance
2. Organisational Capacity: Funding, People and Incentives
3. Entrepreneurial Teaching and Learning
4. Preparing and Supporting Entrepreneurs
5. Digital Transformation and Capability
6. Knowledge Exchange and Collaboration
7. The Internationalised Institution
8. Measuring Impact

Since the instrument was developed as complementary to HEInnovate, the same dimensions were used, however, separate definitions were elaborated for them. For each dimension there are a series of statements to be rated from 1 to 5 or as “not applicable” based on one’s own perception and experience. Statements that were relevant from a RIS3 perspective, but were already included in the HEInnovate tool were not repeated. At the end of the self-assessment, the tool automatically generates a final report with all answers. Different graphical representations of the results are also downloadable. It is also possible to carry out a group self-assessment in order to compare the results.

## Capacitation programmes

During this process all the actors of the three/four nodes of the helix are engaged since the beginning and actively participate in all the activities, through a methodological approach designed to support reposition HEIs as key players in their regions, in the context of Smart Specialisation Strategies and other related iterative and cooperative processes at regional level.

Thus, the primary target of this process are the HEIs who conduct a self-assessment through the new SUNAR tool and develop action plans based on the results of the self-assessment and identification of areas for improvement for each of the tool's dimensions.

Finally, they try to understand, through a joint positioning exercise with other key regional stakeholders, what is their role within the regional innovation ecosystem.

However, these capacitation programmes are also aimed at public/responsible authorities leading RIS3 and other key actors in order to promote their engagement and participation in the regional context also in collaboration with HEIs.

What do these capacitation programmes include? They refer to participatory tools such as training courses, ignition events or multi-actor events, peer workshops, mentoring sessions.

We will now present what steps are necessary for these capacisation programmes addressed to HEIs and to public/responsible authorities leading RIS3 and other key actors.

## Targeted to HEIs

### Training methodology for HEIs

The training course, dedicated to HEIs located in the same region, is divided into three modules with both theoretical and practical parts. It consists of 6 hours synchronous training plus 6 hours of self-study. The aim is to make participants understand HEIs current positioning and raise awareness about the latent potential for HEIs to play a pivotal role in the design and implementation of innovation-driven regional development strategies. Participants can also learn about the HEInnovate tool, its aims and resources, as well as about the self-assessment process for HEIs using HEInnovate.

Participants additionally have the opportunity to learn more about the SUNAR new self-reflection online tool and its aims.

The material for organising the training course is available at the following link: <http://ris3heinnovate.eu/training-materials/>

The course is designed for:

- Top management of university/faculty (rector, vice-rectors, deans, vice-deans) – current or former
- Professors/Teachers per Faculty (e.g. Heads of Department, members of university/faculty Academic and Scientific Bodies preferably involved in management/administration) – current or former
- Researchers per Faculty (preferably involved in management/administration or university/faculty Academic and Scientific Bodies) – current or former
- Heads of HEI Centres
- Professional and support staff (e.g. Science park Career Advisors/Technology Transfer Office/Administrative offices/IT support/Financial departments) on University or faculty level – current or former
- Persons working at education administration and/or units directly governed by the Rector/Dean

Obviously, evaluating a HEI therefore requires informed and educated participants, familiar with its functioning and activities.

### **How to carry out a self-reflection process: Self-assessment**

After completing the training, universities are invited to complete the registration to the SUNAR platform and perform self-assessment. If possible, there should be a “sharing session” or “sharing tool” for HEIs to provide their feedback and suggestions of improvement. The results are then analysed in order to proceed to the next stage of the action plan.

### **Levering HEIs organisational change: organising and holding peer support meetings; designing and implementing an action plan**

#### Peer support meetings

After proceeding with the completion of the self-reflection process, each HEI is invited to analyse the self-assessment results. Based on the conclusions of the assessment, organisers, through three peer support meetings, help HEIs to perform a SWOT or similar analysis based on results and identify possible domains of improvement as part of an action plan. HEIs have to define stages in the action plan, i.e. short, medium and long term measures and focus only on the implementation of the short term ones.

Therefore, the result will be the development of the organisational action plan based on the self-assessment results.

#### Implementation of the action plan



Organizers carry out interviews to HEIs involved in the previous activities to follow-up the implementation of the action plan.

### **Consensus building among regional HEIs: organising peer workshops for a joint positioning**

This positioning will comprise a declaration of intentions and motivations towards the regional development, RIS3 and collaborative processes with members of the triple/quadruple helix at regional level, namely businesses and local authorities/policy makers, as well as representatives of the civil society (if relevant). Participants debate and agree on a joint positioning for the regional group of HEIs engaged in the project activities.

The aim is to reach a joint agreement on HEIs positioning as a regional asset. This collaborative type of activity is to be done by organising joint events, such as workshops.

## Targeted to public/responsible authorities leading RIS3 and other key actors

### **Training methodology for public/responsible authorities leading RIS3 and other key actors**

It consists of a training course designed for public/responsible authorities leading RIS3 and other key actors located in the same region. It is divided into 7 hours synchronous theoretical training with practical parts plus 5 hours of self-study.

The aim of this course is to understand the potential of cooperating with HEIs and explore the most efficient ways to collaborate with HEIs, as well as with other regional stakeholders for the mutual benefit of all players from the regional innovation system.

Participants are able to learn about the key concepts related to RIS3) and their relevance in the current and future context; to identify the different types of stakeholders involved in the design and implementation of innovation-driven regional development strategies, their specific roles and benefits of multi-stakeholder cooperation. They also have the opportunity to learn more about the HEInnovate tool and how it supports the role of universities and collaboration with other stakeholders of the innovation ecosystem.

In the final part of the course they will learn about SUNAR new self-reflection online tool to understand how it supports the role of the various regional stakeholders for a successful innovation-driven ecosystem. This part is also useful for them to be involved as external actors in HEIs self-evaluation processes.

The material for organising the training course is available at the following link:  
<http://ris3heinnovate.eu/training-materials/>

The course is designed for:

- Regional and local public authorities
- RIS3 responsible organisations (i.e. regional and in some cases national authorities or organisations responsible for the elaboration and implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies)
- Representatives of the business environment (Businesses, business organisations, associations, trade associations, clusters, chambers of commerce, etc.)

- Representatives of workers, consumers and citizens at large (NGOs, consumers' or workers' associations, student organisations, individuals, etc.).

### **Levering RIS3 and other co-creation processes: presenting and fine-tuning the joint positioning; leveraging RIS3 design and other collaborative processes; supporting the design of RIS3**

It will be possible to affirm the positioning of HEIs as key regional assets for innovation and development.

To this aim it will include meetings, workshops and a bigger event. The main goal is to contribute to the finalisation of the joint positioning of HEIs and to capitalise on/add value to its content especially linked to RIS3 design and other phases.

## Replicating the RE-ACT methodology in other contexts

This methodology as outlined in this document can be replicated in order to promote and use it in other regional contexts.

Universities in other regions can use the tool and replicate the activities of the capacitation programmes to start a regional pathway with all the other actors of the quadruple helix aimed at improving the regional innovation ecosystem.

The tool, the project website and the materials produced will remain available to be used by anyone who needs them.

## Conclusions

This document offers everyone the opportunity to undertake a process at regional level involving all the actors of the triple/quadruple helix: universities, local/regional authorities, businesses, citizens and associations.

Thanks to this roadmap, universities will be able to carry out an assessment of their current governance framework, a reflection on current practices and the design of an action plan for lasting change that will help them react quickly and respond fully to the challenges they face. This also implies opening up to other universities and regional public and private actors, intensifying their connections and pursuing their holistic missions for the three pillars of education, research and society.



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