

TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATIONS IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EUROPE 2020: JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE TIR 2020 FOR SMART, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Borut Rončević

Faculty of Information Studies in Novo mesto, Slovenia

School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, Slovenia

E-mail: borut.roncevic@fis.unm.si

Abstract: *The European Union is steering its development by a series of successive strategic documents, its grand strategies. While having important role, these strategies do not have a perfect implementation score and a score of initiatives and research is dedicated to better understand these processes. The article presents one such initiative, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence Technologies and Innovations in Regional Development for Europe 2020, a focal point of competence on the topic. Utilising novel Social Fields approach to innovation, the centre combines original empirical research, public debates and formal and informal learning to collect and disseminate knowledge on the topic.*

Key words: Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence; Europe 2020; technologies; innovations; regional development

1. Introduction

The European Union is steering its development by a series of successive strategic documents, its grand strategies. The first, *the Lisbon Strategy*, valid from 2000 to 2010, set as its aim to make the European Union “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion”. It was succeeded by the grand strategy Europe 2020, which aims to achieve smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The main vision thus remained relatively similar, although implementation tools have been upgraded significantly, especially through Smart Specialisation Strategy (Foray 2015). This upgrade was necessitated by the questionable implementation of the Lisbon Strategy (Makarovič et al. 2014). It seems that the next grand strategy until 2030 will follow the same general strategic emphases.

Generally speaking, the implementation success of the EU grand strategies has been a subject to intense scrutiny (see Silander 2019; Stec and Grzebyk 2018; Pandiloska Jurak, 2019; Rončević, 2019) and various efforts are dedicated to improving it. Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence *Technologies and Innovations in Regional Development for Europe 2020 (TIR 2020)* is one such effort. While the project itself does not aim to have the implementation capacities, since it does not have the required resources and, additionally, it has not been designed with this purpose, it nevertheless has the capacity to make a strong indirect impact. This is done in at least two ways. The first is its focus on contribution of technologies and innovations to implementation of Europe 2020. Their role has been recognised not only by the EU, for example by its emphasis and focus on Smart Specialisation Strategy as a delivery tool for Europe 2020, but also by extensive research on ability of technological innovations to deliver smart, sustainable and inclusive development. Furthermore, this research has provided evidence that these processes do not only depend on technological capabilities but are a result of complex interrelationship between various social forces: institutions, social networks and cognitive frames (Cepoi 2016; Cepoi 2019; Modic and Rončević 2011; Modic and Rončević 2018), as is the case with developmental processes in general (Adam et al. 2005).

These conclusions are also presented in this special journal issue of *Research in Social Change*. In his article, Cepoi utilises meta-analysis to demonstrate the relevance of Social Fields theory – the theoretical background of TIR 2020 – in analysing the processes of innovation, ergo the “smart” aspect of the much-desired European growth. In his article, he also presents the data collection tool that we have used to collect the data in 20 European regions, as a part TIR 2020. Pandiloska Jurak narrowed her focus on the importance of high-tech companies for EU economy, from the particular perspective of the EU grand strategies. Hafner and Modic further narrowed focus down to deal with the specific case of the technological innovations in the automotive industry, the backbone of the EU industry as a whole, but in many cases also the crucial line of regional innovation systems. Džajić Uršič, on the other hand, shifted her attention to the “sustainable” growth, by outlining methodology to deal with increasingly large body of work on Circular Economy. This special journal issue is concluded by Erman’s methodological review of prospects for innovation performance on European level.

Hence comes the second impact of TIR 2020 on implementation of Europe 2020. Centre of Excellence was designed as a multi-activity focal point for competence and knowledge on implementation of Europe 2020 vision of

smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, which includes not only research, but also formal and informal learning, social networking, and infrastructure for sharing of relevant knowledge and ideas.

2. The ambition of TIR 2020

To achieve this, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence titled Technology and Innovations in Regional Development for Europe 2020 (TIR2020) was designed to be the focal point for competence and knowledge on implementation of Europe 2020 vision of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth via technological innovations on the regional level, with a particular focus on its institutional, social and cognitive foundations and mechanisms. Furthermore, TIR2020 was designed to complement and upgrade the activities of its predecessor project, Jean Monnet Chair CPE 2020, focusing on implementation deficit of the EU grand strategies.

To achieve ambitious goals, TIR2020 is based on i.) Open Innovation 2.0, an emerging paradigm where academia, policymakers, industry and civil society co-create the future and drive structural changes, ii.) Open Source model, drawing from and contributing to knowledge freely available to the public, and iii.) Social Fields conceptual framework, where regional systems of technological innovations are continuously (re)shaped by institutions, social networks and cognitive frames. TIR2020 will engage a variety of target groups, i.e. academia, students, professionals, policymakers, businesses and civil society.

In TIR2020 we set up infrastructure, methodologies, protocols, and tools to systematically collect, evaluate and make publicly available both already existing documentary resources and new primary empirical data. All are available on TIR2020 platform www.tir2020.net. This is the foundation for multi-level policy debate with relevant audiences (conference special sessions, joint field trips and round table discussions) and enables us to develop content and tools on EU subjects, to complement and upgrade current courses and curricula (course modules, summer schools, workshops).

These activities are carefully interwoven to incorporate principles of integrated collaboration, co-created shared value and rapid adoption of strategic vision of successful, smart and inclusive growth. As a result, TIR2020 will continue to advance interdisciplinary EU studies and deal with the phenomenon of EU implementation deficit, with a view to offer research and educational tools that could be utilised throughout Europe, to contribute to awareness of EU grand strategies and their implementation on regional level.

TIR2020 tackled an important policy issue and is at the same time providing academic value added. The European Union has been continuously rethinking its global position amidst emerging economic and geopolitical. Europe 2020 provides a number of good guidelines on how to meet the challenges, especially its focus on successful, smart and inclusive growth, in which technology and innovations on the regional level play one of key implementation mechanisms and significant resources are dedicated to this. However, long-standing policy implementation deficit of the European Union is also recognised for its grand strategies, including the initially ambitious Lisbon Strategy. Is Europe 2020 set to fail as well? Implementation deficit of the Lisbon Strategy was not due to the changed economic circumstances after 2008 which could hardly have been foreseen when the initial document was adopted, but due to failing to recognize the role of its institutional, social and cognitive underpinnings. This is also the main obstacle to success of Europe 2020. Excellent knowledge on this topic is one of the key necessary conditions to reduce implementation deficit.

TIR2020 is designed to achieve the maximum benefit per available resources. This also includes maximisation of the relevance of proposal for the specific objectives of Jean Monnet Centres of Excellence. We are blending activities of TIR2020 with already existing events at host institution to the greatest possible extent and by providing a 'clever' combination of research infrastructural development, including development of relevant methodologies, protocols and tools, educational activities at BA, MA and PhD levels of studies, as well as the winter camp workshops and summer schools, and outreach events, we aim to encourage synergistic effects and to achieve 'more with less'.

Firstly, Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence TIR2020 will gather the expertise and competencies of high-level experts in the field of EU studies. These experts were identified and communicated already during development of infrastructural framework for TIR2020 and then engaged during its various activities, among others through multi-level policy debates organized during the series of thematic events, workshops, and conference special sessions and during the thematic field trips. A number of high-level experts are expected to participate in its activities also in the future. Here we are not referring only to EU experts from academia, we also aim to attract high-level professionals from consultancy, public administrations and civil society.

Secondly, TIR2020 is designed to collect existing resources with the purpose to develop synergies between various disciplines and resources in European Union studies. In fact, one of the key activities of TIR2020 was to set up research infrastructure, including development of methodologies,

protocols, and tools to systematically collect, evaluate and make publicly available both already existing documentary resources and new primary empirical data from a wide variety of disciplines (sociology, policy analysis, economic, economic geography, regional studies etc.). Centre of excellence provides not only one-stop-shop for a variety of resources. Instead, carefully designed and interwoven activities allow and enhance their cross-fertilization, exploitation and will continue to encourage debates across the boundaries of academic disciplines.

Thirdly, TIR2020 also encourages debates across boundaries of academia, businesses, public administration and the civil society, thereby allowing democratic participation in high-level debates on the issues of utmost importance to development of European societies. It will continue to do so by ensuring representation of these sectors in its outreach activities. However, this will not only contribute to openness to civil society, but also to increased relevance of TIR2020, recognizing the ubiquitous and multi-level nature of the policy process at stake, i.e. the implementation of Europe 2020 on the regional level by encouraging technologies and innovations in regional development.

In addition to these main specific objectives, Centre of Excellence TIR2020 implemented two additional activities each academic year. Firstly, its senior members specifically encouraged, advised and mentored the young generation of higher education teachers and researchers in European Union studies. TIR2020 included three young scholars at the beginning of their academic careers as part of the staff. They contributed to design of this Centre of Excellence and will continue to work on its implementation. Furthermore, various outreach activities of TIR2020 such as conference special sessions, workshops, special debates, summer schools and field trips will continue to actively encourage participation of junior colleagues.

Secondly, TIR2020 organized a large number of activities designed also to target policymakers at local, regional and national level as well as civil society. This is, in fact, necessary condition for successful implementation of this project, since this Centre of Excellence is dealing with multi-level policy process, in which a number of stakeholders play important role and in which we are focusing on the role of institutions, social networks and cognitive frames. These events were three winter camps with participation of students, young professionals and academics, three multi-day joint international field trips with participation of all target groups, three special thematic sessions at a conference that enabled scientific scrutiny of the results and nine round tables were be organized to enable more applied scrutiny of TIR2020 process by industry representatives and policy-makers. In this entire process, to

achieve objectives and engage target groups TIR2020 systematically incorporated principles of integrated collaboration co-created shared value and rapid adoption.

3. Methodology

The methodology has been developed to meet the overall envisage objectives of Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence TIR2020, i.e. to develop and test innovative educational approach and related materials to advance the acceptance of the EU grand strategies, in this case the Europe 2020, and with a view to foster development and mainstreaming of interdisciplinary EU studies at the intersection of economic studies with comparative regionalism. At the same time, we are attentive to the need to offer educational tools that could be utilised in other environments with the goal to contribute to awareness of EU grand strategies and their implementation throughout Europe.

The working methodology is combining four interdisciplinary elements:

- i. The developed educational approach will be based on student-centred learning, shifting the focus from professor to the student, aiming to develop autonomy and independence of the learner, which will substantially increase the quality of the teaching and assure better results.
- ii. We incorporates the key elements of Open Innovation 2.0, a new paradigm where academia, policy-makers, industry and civil society work together to co-create structural changes far beyond the scope of individual actor. These elements guide the debating activities during the events.
- iii. The methodology takes into account the social fields' theory, analytical approach in which regional innovation systems are conceptualised as social fields shaped by institutions, social networks and cognitive frames. This approach can also be instrumental in providing the relevant tools and provide inclusion of civil society members in the process.
- iv. This approach provides the basis for research activities, which enables us to collect primary information in a number of European regions: crowdsourcing and online platform will in the future be further utilised to collect and exchange knowledge, information and data after the end of TIR2020.

TIR2020 thus incorporates principles of integrated collaboration, co-created shared value and rapid adoption. Consequently, teaching activities

not only include (future) professionals undertaking degree awarding studies, but also industry representatives, policymakers and civil society.

TIR2020 is planned to achieve maximum impact with available resources by utilising the existing infrastructure. This is not only economically efficient but also allowed avoiding unnecessary new content loading in addition to already existing one. Instead, relevant fields of EU studies were integrated where appropriate in the existing curricula and events, thereby i.) providing increased visibility of highly relevant EU topics at an institution with EU studies at a nascent phase of development, ii.) improving the relevance of subjects which have not been specifically designed to deliver EU studies, and iii.) responding to an identified need to develop this field of study.

4. Conclusion: TIR2020 and its Impact

TIR 2020 particularly impacted three groups. Firstly, policymakers, public administration, industry representatives and civil society. Secondly, students and academic staff of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence host institution. Finally, and most importantly, the broader academic community and knowledge on European integration.

TIR2020 reached the first group by utilization of well-developed regional networks, where host institution often acts as a moderator in various initiatives. They were actively participating in TIR2020 in line with Open Innovation 2.0 paradigm to co-create structural changes with other actors. They were encouraged to participate in education (online courses, winter schools) and research activities (collection of practices and exchange of information) and invited to outreach events (transnational round tables/special sessions, conference special sessions). The impact of this participation influenced their awareness of Europe 2020. The active participation of policymakers, businesses and civil society will strengthen intra-regional cooperation and increase mutual trust, which can spark further joint innovative efforts in these semi-peripheral regions.

The second group, the academic community at the host institution was approached directly and extremely actively participated at most TIR2020 events and not only contributed, but also benefited from them. This benefit is both academic, i.e. discovering scientifically relevant EU topics, as well as pedagogic-didactical, i.e. contributing to development and testing new teaching method bringing greater teacher-student communication and achieving better learning outcomes. Students benefited from close communication with their professors, developing their autonomy and independent thinking, which will substantially increase the quality of the

teaching and assure better results. The spillover effects of the discussions are innovative approaches to understanding and spreading other relevant topics as well.

Last but not least, the activities provided by TIR2020 also strengthened the academia – policy-makers communication, thereby providing them with new opportunities for future cooperation. The results of TIR2020 are available online and will continue to be. Availability of the material will enhance the knowledge about innovative approaches in teaching on EU studies. The events provided an open forum for international cross-disciplinary debates on the topic and enable cooperation with academic staff from other European academic institutions. Scientific knowledge will benefit from intensive debates with the stakeholders, providing unique insight and access to data on factors, bottlenecks and mechanisms of implementation deficits of the EU grand strategies. Last but not least, we collected and offered unique primary data, providing insight in the very core of regional technology transfer and innovation processes.

This does not imply that the story of TIR2020 is concluded. We have set up an important scientific infrastructure, that can in the future be further upgraded either by upgrading the database with new developments, or by exploring specific limiting issues such as intellectual property (Modic et al. 2019) or reorientation towards sustainable and responsible development (Fric et al. 2019; Džajić Uršič 2020).

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