



# **Fostering collaboration across entrepreneurial ecosystems**

Guide to mapping, action plan design and peer learning for regions

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## **ABSTRACT**

Launched in late 2018, the EU project '**Fostering collaboration through mapping, analysing and interlinking of European Entrepreneurial Regions**' has the objective of strengthening the impact of existing actions aimed at further developing start-ups and scale-ups in the context of the European Entrepreneurial Regions initiative.

The EER Label is granted to regions with an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth or competences. 10 of the 30 EER labelled regions have been involved in this collaborative project: Catalonia, Central Macedonia, Flanders, Île-de-France, Lombardy, Lower Austria, Marche, North Brabant, Western Greece, North and Western Region of Ireland.

This Guidebook supports and provides guidance to regions to foster their entrepreneurial ecosystems through interregional collaboration and to implement related strategic actions in interregional partnerships. Step-by-step guidance is provided on how to identify and map entrepreneurial ecosystems and existing linkages across regions, and how to design interregional Action Plans along strategic themes for the regions and implement related peer-learning exercises.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

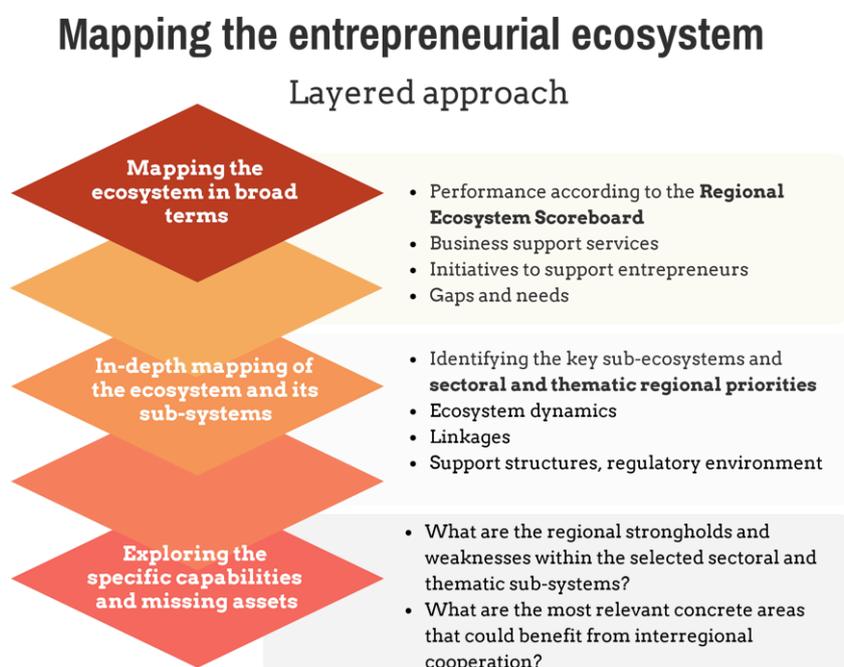
Ten EER labelled regions notably *Catalonia, Central Macedonia, Flanders, Île-de-France, Lombardy, Lower Austria, Marche, North Brabant, Western Greece, North and Western Region of Ireland* participated in the EU initiative '**Fostering collaboration through mapping, analysing and interlinking of European Entrepreneurial Regions**'. The objective of the cooperation was to strengthen the impact of existing actions aimed at further developing start-up and scale-up support by building on the experience of the *European Entrepreneurial Regions*<sup>1</sup> (EER) initiative of the Committee of the Regions.

This guidebook has been prepared with the aim to supporting regions that would like to foster their entrepreneurial ecosystems through interregional collaboration and implement related strategic actions in interregional partnerships. It provides step-by-step guidance on how to identify and map entrepreneurial ecosystems and existing linkages across regions, and how to design interregional Action Plans and implement related peer-learning exercises.

### **Mapping of entrepreneurial ecosystems**

When analysing entrepreneurial ecosystems, first it is important to keep in mind that there are **no universal benchmarks or unique models to follow** to become successful, as also highlighted by the existing academic literature and international case studies. Achieving success in an entrepreneurial ecosystem is a unique journey of a region based on its core competencies such as for instance talent. To analyse regional entrepreneurial ecosystems, a layered 'step-wise' approach can be applied which gradually deepens the analysis and explores the potential for synergies in and with the regions.

Figure 1: Layered approach to map the entrepreneurial ecosystem



The process starts with an initial mapping of the entrepreneurial actors and can be extended to the exploration of relevant sub-systems and cross-cutting topics that have the most potential for improvement, synergy creation and interregional linkages.

The ecosystem analysis framework developed within the EER project relies on identifying success factors that could influence the performance of entrepreneurial ecosystems. The success factors analysed refer to *actors* and their contribution to the entrepreneurial ecosystems; the *framework conditions*, which are the specific circumstances of the region that may or may not be conducive to entrepreneurship; and to *policies*, which may be used to intervene in the system when there are perceived gaps.

A specific focus of the EER project has been placed on **scale-ups**, notably companies that have an average annualised return of at least 20% in the past three years with at least ten employees in the beginning of the period. The main difference between start-ups and scale-ups is related to the development stage they are in: while start-ups are considered newly founded companies, which are only at the beginning of defining their product or services, scale-ups are more advanced, and have already set their market and product niche.

In order to collect information that can provide sufficient evidence for the process of developing interregional synergies, specific data has been collected on the thematic priorities selected by the regions. Lessons learned during the data collection and analysis process, from the initial mapping to cross-regional analysis, include the following:

- It is important to focus the data collection on the relevant indicators and not overload the users with too many indicators; careful selection is key, especially for priority areas for thematic and horizontal cooperation.
- Being creative and persistent with the data collection is necessary; some ecosystems do not have sufficient data readily available. Researchers need to collect data on-site, either through interviews, or, where time and resources allow it, through targeted surveys with stakeholders.
- The research should find a balance between collecting data that are available and are comparable across a broader coverage of European regions and specific data to the individual regions but still relevant for the regional mapping.
- Determining the success factors of the ecosystem relies not only on a quantitative data analysis process but requires a qualitative data interpretation and cross-checking/validation with the regional stakeholders.

### ***Designing interregional Action Plans***

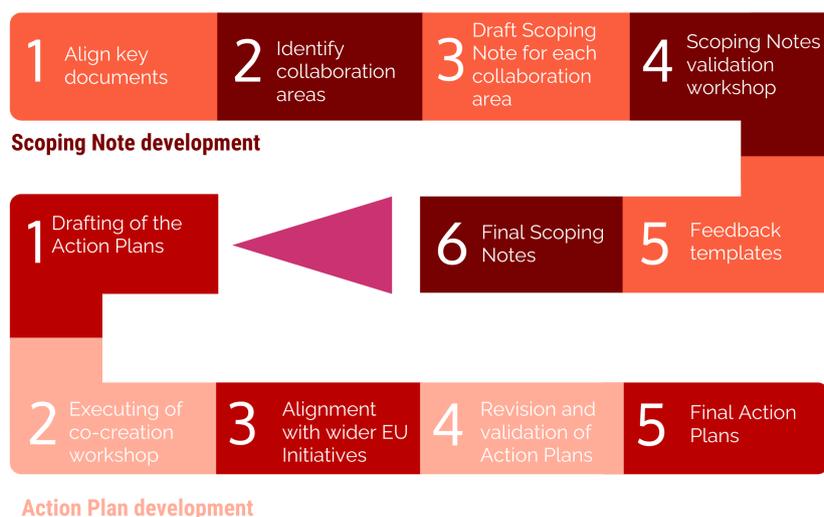
In designing interregional Action Plans, it is important to understand the rationale for collaborating beyond the borders of one's region, e.g. why would regions engage in interregional collaboration? Key to successful cooperation is tackling regions' real needs. Key drivers and needs for interregional collaboration include:

- Policy learning/alignment
- Access to missing competences
- Reaching critical mass
- Access to wider community of potential end-users
- Reducing duplication, redundancies and/or costs
- Increasing efficiency in policy development and implementation

The **need to tap into expertise that may not be available in the region as well as the need to join forces for more effective policies**, facilitated by the internet and lowering transport costs, has increased transregional and transnational mobility. Not only do start-ups seek new markets outside their regions, they also build on the possibilities enabled through the Single Market and contract experts, find capital and relocate part of their activities within the EU.

Figure 2 Designing process of interregional Action Plans

## Designing interregional action plans



The process of designing interregional Action Plans involves the identification of common, broad priority areas for collaboration, based on the insights from the in-depth mapping phase and developing these further into Action Plans, including collaborative actions and monitoring. **Moving from mapping to matching** requires the analysis of mapping data in view of a first identification of potential synergies between regions. **Thematic and horizontal areas are identified** as areas with a potential for the regions to engage in interregional cooperation. Thematic themes are outlined to include terms such as Industry 4.0/digitalisation of industry, MedTech, and Agri-food, at a broad level of granularity. Horizontal themes include subjects such as access to finance, skills gaps, employment and mobility, including soft landing packages for entrepreneurs going cross-border, cooperation and exchanges between entrepreneurs/incubators/investors, among others.

**Scoping is clearly one of the most important steps in the process.** The 'scope' of the Strategic Action Theme needs to be defined at the right level, i.e. it should be specific enough to trigger the interest of regional actors and industry, but it should be transversal enough to remain relevant for many companies and regions. By combining regional information on own ambitions, challenges, strengths and actors, culminating in a Scoping Note, one can detect more granular synergies between regions, segments of value chains, and actors.

**Action Plans themselves are envisaged to be living documents**, accompanying the interregional collaboration opportunity identified, and hence will allow for the uptake and

integration of further notions in their lifetime, guided by regional interest and commitment. Action Plans depart from Scoping Notes, going on to identify and detail the 'right' actions. Action Plans that cover more granular areas and represent the regional interest, and thus their commitment to the actions, can cover a variety of actions tailored to the regional ecosystems' needs.

**Transversal learnings refer to aspects of importance throughout the Action Plan development**, and should be kept in mind when executing interregional collaboration. Particular points of importance include:

- **Drawing on thematic and horizontal themes.** A balance and good mix of thematic and horizontal areas is needed. That being said, it is equally important to distinguish various processes (i.e. clearly distinctive specific dynamics). Horizontal areas should be thematically neutral, if possible, with thematic areas used as test cases for horizontal areas.
- **Regional commitment, throughout all stages, remains key.** Regional commitment is the starting point of any interregional partnership. Commitment can take on many forms (i.e. set up a specific legal entity, signing a memorandum of understanding, having an open or closed partnership, among others), however it is important to check and reinforce regional commitment based on the specific needs of the region and the Action Plan and its stage of development. Some good practices to consider are:
  - **Engagement of the 'right' stakeholders in the Scoping Note process and Action Plan development:** Regional participation will vary in the course of the partnership's life cycle. For example, policy officers will tend to be heavily involved at the beginning, followed by technology experts and then industry managers, cluster managers and technology experts, with the latter two being especially important for the thematic Action Plans.
  - **Renewing commitment.** While further developing the actions proposed, it is important to renew the commitment because regional interests at partnership level may differ once work is underway at a lower level, i.e. at the level of the Action Plan.
- **Identifying funding opportunities in line with the proposed Action Plans.** For the success of the partnership, it is paramount that the search for funding starts at the earliest stage possible (i.e. right at the Scoping Note stage), exploring what is needed and available among the regions, not necessarily what is fundable.

#### ***Peer learning activities:***

Practice-oriented learning activities are instrumental to enhance knowledge exchange between regional ecosystem players dealing with similar challenges, and to foster the sharing of best practices and experience among entrepreneurs from different European regions and cities.

A key strength of the process is that – as peers – they can readily understand the goals of the stakeholders whom they visit and meet, their day-to-day activities and the complexity of their environment. This is really a process of learning and exchange. Peers share their wealth of knowledge with staff from the **business support organisations (BSO)** and entrepreneurs that they visit and meet. They take back to their regions knowledge from the places they visit and the people they meet, strengthening their understanding. This activity thus offers them an opportunity to exchange skills and experiences, and to reflect on their own work and situation.

A policy hack is an adaptation of hackathon. A **policy hack** can be defined as a tool to develop policies with the goal of solving specific challenges. Participants are grouped into teams, and with the support of mentors, analyse the challenge(s) proposed and develop a set of solutions that address the challenge(s). During the process, the participants are guided by a mentor with skills on the topic whose role is to facilitate the discussion and provide ideas, but not to intervene in their conclusions/solutions the participants arrive at.

Depending on the length of the policy hack, the draft solutions can be presented at the end of the day for shorter sessions (e.g. 'mini' policy hacks), or broken up into two phase for longer sessions; a first validation midway and once again at the end of the day. It is also possible to have a jury assessing the solutions and to offer prizes to the best solutions. The mentors will also provide feedback during the process. It is also advisable to have a moderator/presenter on the day.

The main benefit of a policy hack is that participants from diverse backgrounds or from various groups of stakeholders, work together to develop a solution from the ground up. Ideas and proposals benefit from instant feedback and validation, making it a very interactive and robust exercise.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The EU initiative '**Fostering collaboration through mapping, analysing and interlinking of European Entrepreneurial Regions**' (also referred to as the 'EER project' in this document) was launched in December 2018 with the objective to strengthen the impact of existing actions aimed at further developing start-up and scale-up support by building on the experience of the *European Entrepreneurial Regions*<sup>2</sup> (EER) initiative of the Committee of the Regions.

Within EER, the regions with the most credible, forward-thinking and promising entrepreneurship vision have been awarded the EER label. This label has been granted to applicant regions which show an outstanding and innovative entrepreneurial policy strategy, irrespective of their size, wealth and competences. The network of regions and cities awarded the EER label is currently composed of 30 territories from 16 EU Member States. The EER labelled regions involved in this particular collaborative project are Catalonia, Central Macedonia, Flanders, Île-de-France, Lombardy, Lower Austria, Marche, North Brabant, Western Greece, North and Western Region of Ireland.

The project partnership fosters the development and implementation of concrete collaborative action plans that will support scale-ups and entrepreneurs along common thematic priorities. The summary of the project and its main activities are presented in Figure 3.

The **purpose** of this publication is to support and provide guidance to regions that would like to foster their entrepreneurial ecosystems through interregional collaboration and implement related strategic actions in interregional partnerships. It provides step-by-step guidance on how to identify and map entrepreneurial ecosystems and existing linkages across regions, and how to design interregional Action Plans and implement related peer-learning exercises.

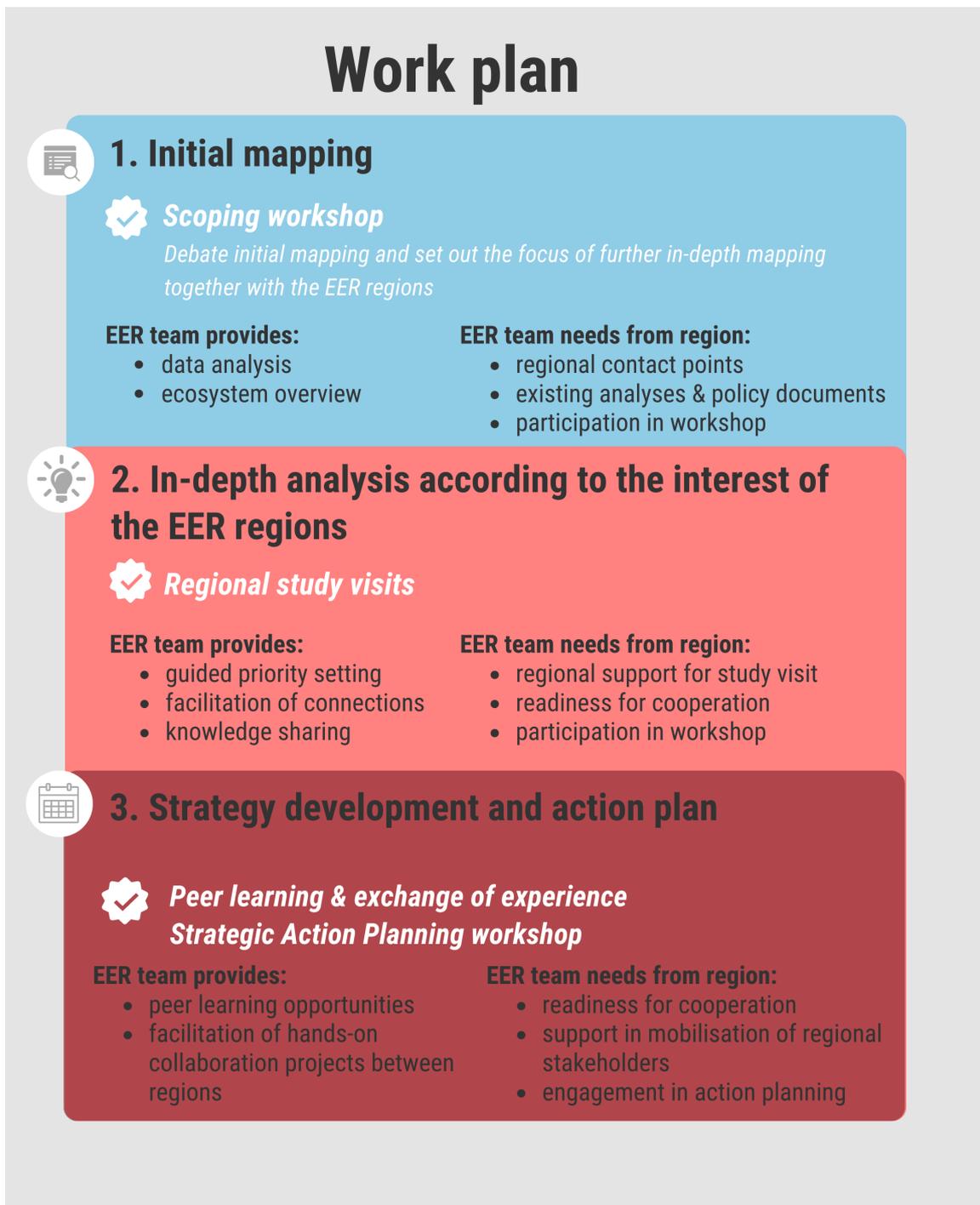
The **guide is organised in four chapters:**

- After the introduction, Chapter 2 provides guidance on how to map entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE). It defines what is an EE (presenting the actors present, the framework conditions supporting better EE development, and what is the role of policy), how to assess the maturity of the ecosystem, the methodologies for mapping regional EE, how to map cross-regional synergies between different regional ecosystems, and finally how to map cross-regional interactions between ecosystems.
- Chapter 3 guides the regions on the designing process of interregional Action Plans. It presents the drivers for interregional collaboration and provides step-by-step instructions on the process, by first defining and outlining Strategic Action Themes in Scoping Notes and then developing Action Plans.
- The final Chapter 4 presents peer-learning activities to further enhance collaboration among regions.

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<sup>2</sup> See Committee of the Regions, EER initiative <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/Pages/european-entrepreneurial-region.aspx>

Figure 3 Overview of project activities and work plan



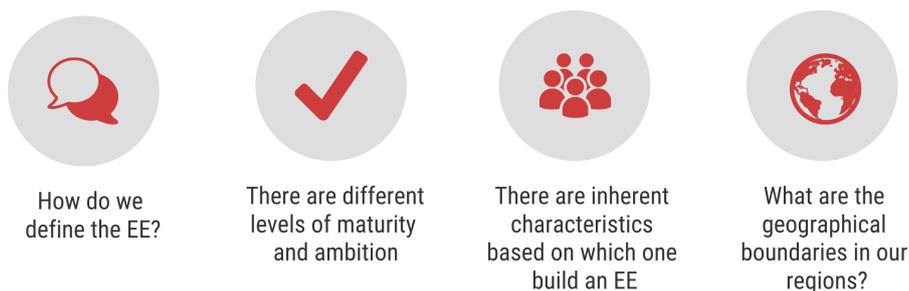
Source: Technopolis Group

## 2 MAPPING ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS

This chapter provides quick guidance on methodologies used to map entrepreneurial ecosystems and the potential for building interregional linkages and fostering cooperation. Figure 4 provides a snapshot of the key issues that the mapping of ecosystems needs to tackle.

Figure 4 Entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE)

### Entrepreneurial Ecosystems



Source: Tsipouri, 2019

#### 2.1 What are entrepreneurial ecosystems (EE)?

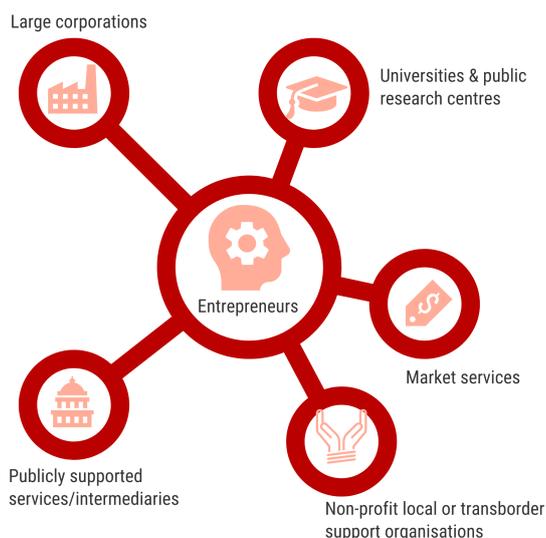
Regions can be a good place to understand and stimulate the development of entrepreneurial ecosystems. Within this project, a targeted framework has been devised with the objective of analysing the state of development of entrepreneurial ecosystems, which we outline in the following sub-sections.

Figure 5 Entrepreneurial ecosystems

### Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Framework conditions/conducive environment:

- Human capital /talent
- Financial capital
- Local infrastructure
- Culture
- Spatial concentration



Source: Authors

When analysing ecosystems, it is important to keep in mind that there are **no universal benchmarks or unique models to follow** to become successful, as also highlighted by the existing academic literature and international case studies. Achieving success in an entrepreneurial ecosystem is a unique journey of the region based on core competencies (e.g. talent, industries, incumbent firms) (Tsipouri, 2019). To a large extent, the type of region affects the propensity for start-up activity. For instance, some rural regions are structurally different than urbanised areas or start-up hubs, nevertheless they have their own individual framework conditions and start-up systems. This needs to be kept in mind when starting the mapping exercise and interregional strategy development.

The ecosystem analysis framework developed within the EER project relies on identifying success factors that could influence the performance of entrepreneurial ecosystems. The success factors analysed refer to *actors* and their contribution to the EE; the *framework conditions*, which are the specific circumstances of the region that may or may not be conducive to entrepreneurship; and to *policies*, which may be used to intervene in the system when there are perceived gaps (Tsipouri, 2019).

### 2.1.1 The actors of an entrepreneurial ecosystem

An ecosystem is a network of many different types of actors who interact in a dynamic, self-regulating fashion (Isenberg, 2014). These types of actors may include “entrepreneurs (both potential and existing), entrepreneurial organisations (e.g. firms, venture capitalists, business angels, banks), institutions (universities, public sector agencies, financial bodies) and entrepreneurial processes (e.g. the business birth rate, numbers of high growth firms, levels of entrepreneurial ambition etc.) which formally and informally coalesce to connect, mediate and govern the performance within the local entrepreneurial environment.” (Mason et al, 2014).

However, the most important factor is the density and the interaction among the actors described. There is no single driver that can be singled out, as each of these actors play a specific role (see Table 1) and are in an interdependent relationship.

Table 1 Actors involved in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE)

Actors	Role in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
<b>Entrepreneurs</b>	<p>Entrepreneurs are the key actor in the EE from the very first stage, especially if they are ambitious and have growth aspirations.</p> <p>A successful ecosystem needs leadership in the form of visible and accessible entrepreneurs committed to the region (Stam and Spigel, 2016). Entrepreneurs not only create companies and jobs, but the more mature ones can be a resource for start-ups, as they can invest their time, money and expertise in supporting new entrepreneurial activity.</p>
<b>Large corporations</b>	<p>While large companies might sometimes act as competitors to start-ups, they can also be engaged in a support function for entrepreneurs. Case studies point even to large companies as being the trigger for ecosystems.</p> <p>When explicitly trying to help the EE, large companies can provide a convening space and resources for local start-ups. They can also be a source of customers, new market channels or of talented executives.</p> <p>Large companies benefit from engaging with start-ups by gaining insights into new innovative products and services, access to new markets, new talent and fresh perspectives on their business and the ecosystem.</p>

Actors	Role in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
<p><b>Universities and public research centres</b></p>	<p>Universities are a big source of talent and should be well connected to the community (Stam and Spigel, 2016). Universities who take a pro-active role in the ecosystem are able to support and provide strong entrepreneurial role models (Feld, 2012), although not all universities are capable of nurturing an EE.</p> <p>The three characteristics of a leading entrepreneurial research university are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) A community catalyst where the start-up community gathers, and information is shared.</li> <li>2) A magnet, teacher and pipeline for the next generation of entrepreneurial talent in the region.</li> <li>3) A source of insight, covering innovative ideas with the potential of being commercialised, but also of knowledge on what makes start-ups and start-up communities work.</li> </ol> <p>However, barriers in academia present challenges to this vision. In the best entrepreneurial universities, entrepreneurial engagement is rewarded as part of the faculty incentive structure; resources are offered, and cross-campus collaboration is encouraged (Feld, 2012).</p>
<p><b>Market services</b></p>	<p>Entrepreneurs need mentors and advisors, and professional services (legal, consulting, accounting, etc.), specialised in the needs of start-ups and scale-ups. By offering free services at the early stages, these providers develop long-term business relationships with fast-growing companies.</p> <p>In the nascent stage, market services and entrepreneurs might not evolve together. However, the lack of market services will prompt start-ups to leave the region. Market services should be available at an attractive price and locally, otherwise they should be available in a neighbouring region or in other areas accessible to companies.</p> <p>The presence of international services for global entrepreneurship can be a sign of a promising region.</p>
<p><b>Publicly supported services/intermediaries</b></p>	<p>The public sector can intervene in case the market does not offer the necessary services to start-ups in the form of publicly run incubators, co-working spaces, public accelerators, science and technology parks among others.</p> <p>However, for publicly run services, there is a lack of evidence that supports their contribution to the success of an EE (Tsipouri, 2017).</p>
<p><b>Non-profit local or transborder support organisations</b></p>	<p>There are some international organisations that support local systems globally<sup>3</sup>. Likewise, some public organisations<sup>4</sup> also offer support outside their native country.</p>

Source: Authors based on Tsipouri, L., 2019: Comparison of ecosystems literature review as part of the EER project

While the entrepreneur is the key actor in an EE, not all types of entrepreneurs contribute to making an entrepreneurial ecosystem dynamic. Self-employment is not considered entrepreneurship and may not contribute to growth and development (Tsipouri, 2019). Substantial company growth is more likely to be achieved by **ambitious entrepreneurs**, not the “average” entrepreneur; the same applies to innovation or internationalisation (Isenberg, 2011). Ambitious entrepreneurs are the first to realise the need to overcome

<sup>3</sup> Endeavor: <https://endeavor.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Orange Grove

regional hurdles. In the literature, they are variously called new international ventures (McDougall, 1989), global start-ups (McDougall et al, 1994), infant multinationals (Madsen and Servais, 1997; Aspelund and Moen, 2001), micro-multinationals or innate exporters (Mettler and Williams, 2011). The research available suggests that they are growth-oriented businesses with a strong innovative capacity.

An **entrepreneurial ecosystem does not mean having large numbers of start-ups**; increasing the number of start-ups does not necessarily stimulate economic development, but in fact the opposite can also be true – economic growth stimulates the development of start-ups.

Bearing the above points in minds, it is important to **distinguish between start-ups with ambitious entrepreneurs and SMEs**. While the 'traditional' SMEs generally make up the majority of employment and gross value added in an economy, their characteristics differ from start-ups in several ways. Firstly, given their higher ambition levels, start-ups serve larger markets and have more pronounced growth aspirations than SMEs. Furthermore, start-ups tend to be more innovative and more technology oriented than SMEs. A third characteristic of start-ups is that they operate more based on private capital such as business angel or venture capital funds, while SMEs use bank loans (or government grants in specific projects).

A specific focus of the EER project has been placed on **scale-ups**, which are companies that have an average annualised return of at least 20% in the past three years with at least ten employees in the beginning of the period (OECD, 2007, in Tsipouri, 2019). The main difference between start-ups and scale-ups is related to the development stage they are in: while start-ups are considered newly founded companies, which are only at the beginning of defining their product or services and markets, the scale-ups are more advanced, and have already set their market and product niche. As opposed to start-ups, which are generally starting out on a national market, and many times are too immature to go international, successful scale-ups are capable of competing at the global level, attracting talent, and becoming role models and an inspiration to new entrepreneurs (Tsipouri, 2019). Despite the importance of scale-ups to the regional economy, in many regions there is still a relative lack of focus on them, but also a lack of clear understanding among the regional policy-maker of what a 'scale-up' actually is.

Start-ups with technological innovation (and preferably with high ability to capture profits generated by these innovations) ensure higher likelihood of scaling up. However, technology-driven start-ups are not the only regional driving force, and entrepreneurs can operate in a variety of fields other than technological innovations (Tsipouri, 2019).

**Scale-ups can be a double-edged sword for the region** – ambitious entrepreneurs who start working at the global level may relocate to spaces with better framework conditions. The following section provides an overview of the factors conducive to attracting entrepreneurs to locate in the region.

### *2.1.2 Framework conditions/conducive environment*

In entrepreneurial ecosystems that emerge organically, the framework conditions are already present and evolve to better support the requirements of the ecosystem. Where this is not the case, policy needs to intervene to transform it into a conducive environment. The main components of such an environment are:

- **Human capital/talent:** It is important to have a broad pool of potential employees with the correct skills in all sectors and areas of expertise, including technical workers as well as more business-oriented workers (Stam and Spigel, 2016). Universities and

research centres educate the human capital available. Likewise, there has been a shift towards more entrepreneurial education. However, some literature (Isenberg, 2014) is reluctant to consider entrepreneurial education as a necessary success factor. If there is no balance with other inputs, it might lead to brain drain.

- **Financial capital:** A strong, dense and supportive community of venture capitalists, business angels and seed investors, among others, has to be available, visible and accessible across sectors, demographics and geographies (Stam and Spigel, 2016). One of the most relevant players in this area is the *dealmaker* – serial entrepreneurs, who are involved in the entrepreneurial community in a fiduciary capacity in several entrepreneurial ventures (Mason and Brown, 2014). Dealmaker networks are also important, but they tend to be more present in mature stages (Kauffman, 2015).
- **Local infrastructure:** It is a success factor when it tackles the needs of each ecosystem (they can be technological or of any other kind), and most notably win global connectedness, injecting the global knowledge needed to create world-beating start-ups, the key ingredient of Global Market Search (Genome, 2018).
- **Culture:** It is one of the most important aspects and the most challenging to modify. The creative class, composed of people like entrepreneurs, professors and artists who create meaningful new forms is relevant for an ecosystem. These individuals want to live in nice places where culture is enjoyed, where there is tolerance for new ideas and enjoy being surrounded by like-minded creative individuals (Florida in Feld, 2012). A *culture of openness* is one of the elements of a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem. Clusters and innovation networks need to be internationally linked to avoid stagnating, and they need to offer connections to global value chains and international expertise and markets. It is also important that the core entrepreneurs of each EE cross borders in order to keep the EE alive.
- **Spatial concentration:** Usually the levels of entrepreneurship vary across the territory of a region, since entrepreneurship tends to concentrate in areas where there are favourable conditions. A commonly agreed definition of spatially concentrated ecosystems sets boundaries as located within a 100 km radius around a centre point in a region, although exceptions can also be found due to the local reality (Startup Genome, 2017). Larger regions will need to decide whether to have one or more interconnected hubs instead of spreading entrepreneurship throughout the territory.

### 2.1.3 The role of policy in entrepreneurial ecosystems

Typically, policies can support entrepreneurial ecosystems from two angles: attracting or covering the gaps in the presence of specific actors and improving framework conditions (for example through regulations, subsidy programmes, rules influencing behaviours, etc.)

Policies need to be long term and goal oriented, as well as based on evidence and in a constant learning process, as each ecosystem is unique and needs tailored interventions from the policymakers.

Figure 6 Policy interventions in ecosystems

#### Steps when introducing policy interventions in entrepreneurial ecosystems

1. Start with a vision to define the uniqueness of the ecosystem, i.e. focus on building your own success story.

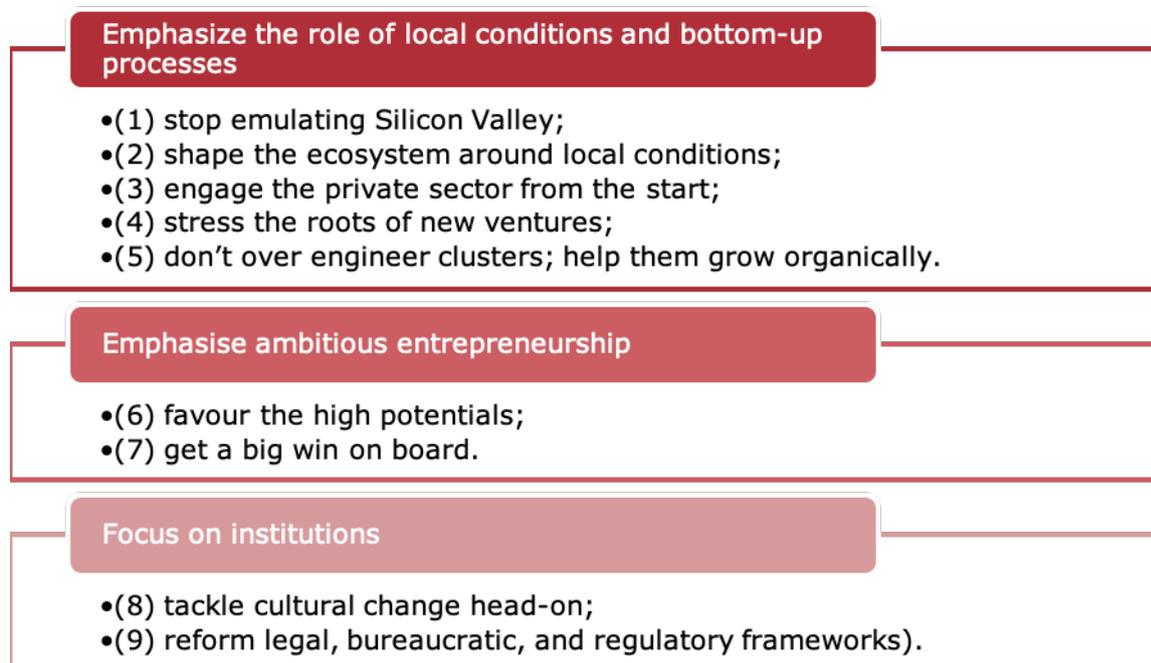
### Steps when introducing policy interventions in entrepreneurial ecosystems

2. Understand the status quo: The vision ideally builds off the core competencies of the region/country, whether it be skills, manufacturing competencies or other unique competencies.
3. Coordination and supervision: In order to successfully launch an ecosystem project in your region or country, it is critical that there is one central unit (person or organisation) that takes on a coordination role.
4. Identify key stakeholders and involve them early on.
5. What are your measures of success? Multiple indicators can potentially serve as key performance indicators (KPIs) for entrepreneurship ecosystems.
6. Focus on the heroes! Who are the solution champions among the stakeholders? Involve them and make sure that they serve as role models for others to follow.

Source: Vogel, 2014 in Tsipouri, 2019

The academic literature is less conclusive in terms of what works in the field of policy interventions for entrepreneurial ecosystems, and there is certainly no one-size-fits-all recipe. Nevertheless, there are several guiding principles on how to approach policy interventions, as portrayed in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 7 Nine principles for policy interventions in entrepreneurial ecosystems



Source: Tsipouri, 2019, based on Isenberg, 2010

## 2.2 Assessing the maturity of ecosystems

The EER regions can be categorised according to different levels of development in their entrepreneurial ecosystems. Based on research (Cukier et al., 2016), we have identified the following stages:

- **Nascent** are systems where there are only few actors with limited interaction and hardly any start-ups
- **Evolving** are systems with some annual birth of start-ups, several scale-up and at least one major success story and access to business angels and venture capital
- **Mature** are systems with a systematic renewal of new companies, scale-ups and mergers and acquisitions (M&As), initial public offerings (IPOs) and enjoy recognition (a brand name) as an EE
- **Sustainable** are ecosystems that attract successful promising start-ups or scale-ups from elsewhere

The table below describes measures that can be used to determine the maturity of ecosystems based on specific metrics. In addition, the colours indicate the importance of specific areas of interventions in defining the level of maturity of an ecosystem.

Table 2 Ecosystem maturity metrics and factors

Maturity factor	Nascent	Evolving	Mature	Self-sustainable
Exit strategies	None	A few	Several M&As; few IPOs	Several M&As and IPOs
Entrepreneurship in universities	<2%	2-10%	~10%	≥10%
Angel funding	Irrelevant	Irrelevant	Some	Many
Culture values for entrepreneurship	<0.5	0.5-0.6	0.6-0.7	>0.7
Specialised media	No	A few	Several	Plenty
Ecosystem data and research	No	No	Partial	Full
Ecosystem generations	0	0	1-2	≥3
Events	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	>Daily

Source: Cukier, 2018; Entrepreneurship in universities indicator = % of alumni that founded a start-up within five years of graduation; Culture values indicator = cultural support index in the global entrepreneurship and development index

Legend:

Less important	Important	Very important
----------------	-----------	----------------

Depending on the type of driver of the ecosystems in the region (market forces or policy), the matrix below has been used to position each EER region participating in the project along the maturity scale.

Table 3 Maturity scale matrix

Stage of EE	Nascent	Evolving	Mature	Sustainable
Trigger of the ecosystem:				
Market-forces				
Policy interventions				

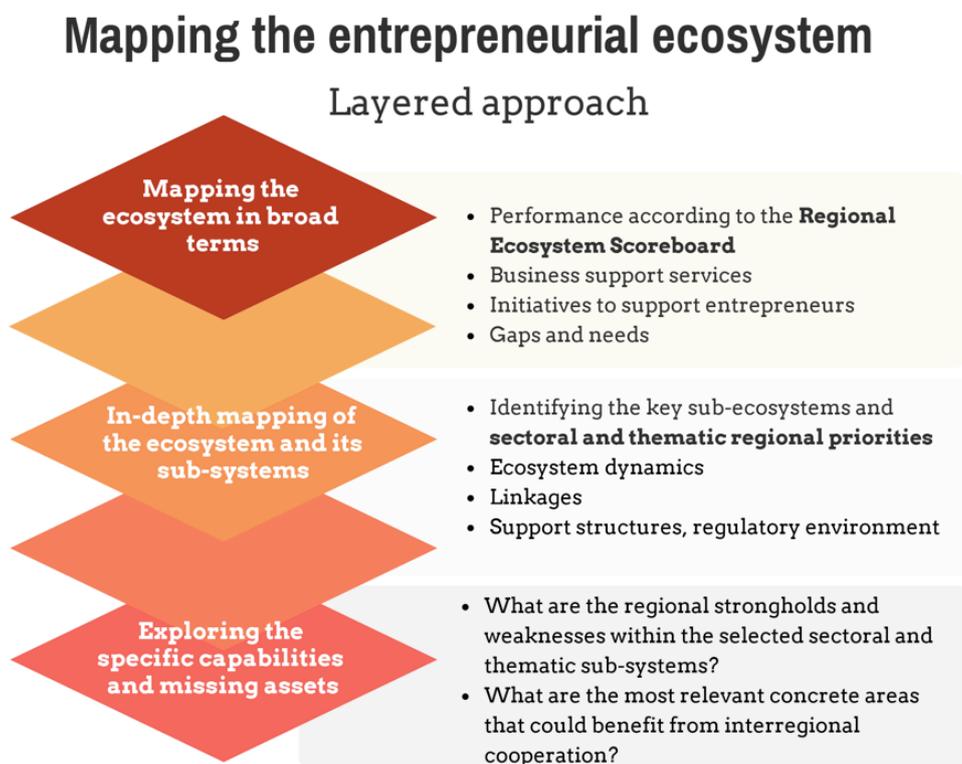
Source: Tsipouri, 2019

### 2.3 Methodologies for mapping regional entrepreneurial ecosystems

To analyse regional entrepreneurial ecosystems, a layered 'step-wise' approach can be applied which gradually deepens the analysis and explores the potential for synergies in and with the regions.

The process starts with an initial mapping of the entrepreneurial actors and can be extended to the exploration of relevant sub-systems and cross-cutting topics that have the most potential for improvement, synergy creation and interregional linkages.

Figure 8 Layered approach to map the entrepreneurial ecosystem



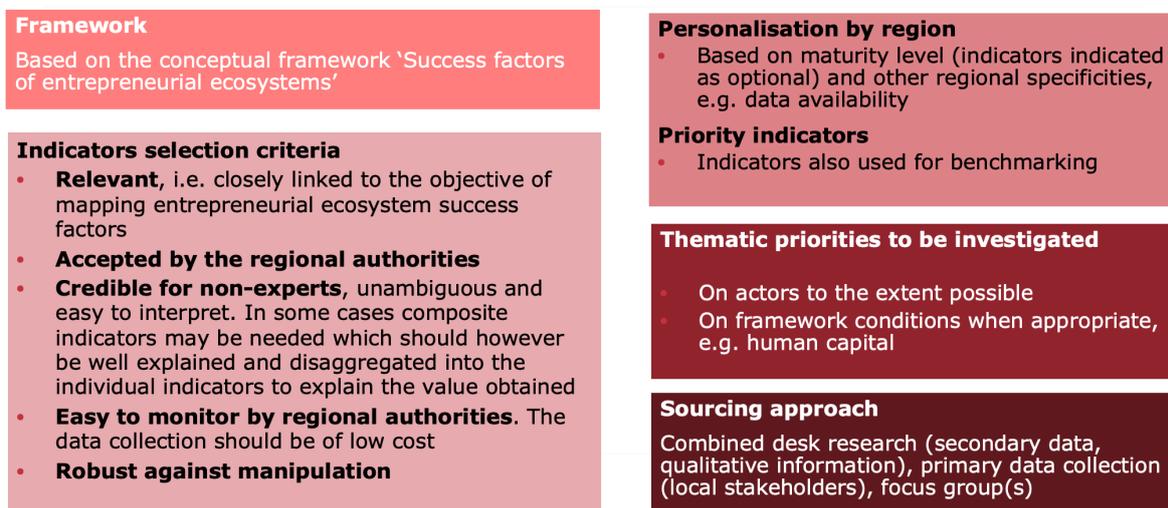
Source: Technopolis Group

After defining the broad regional overview, the next step is to **define thematic or topical areas that are interesting for the regions** and have a potential for interregional cooperation. The final step is to map the more specific capabilities and missing assets, as well as the regional ambitions, including for key areas where there is interest in cooperating.

### 2.3.1 Data analysis for individual regional ecosystems

Based on the assessment framework of key ecosystem success factors described in Section 2.2, the analysis of each regional ecosystem can proceed with the **selection of relevant indicators to measure the performance of a region** along the specified dimensions. Figure 9 provides an overview of the criteria for selecting specific indicators, which refers to how regional authorities can make use of the data and information provided.

Figure 9 Main steps for selecting indicators for the ecosystems' KPIs



Source: Technopolis Group

In order to collect information that can provide sufficient evidence for the process of developing interregional synergies in the next phases of the project, specific data should also be collected on the thematic priorities selected by the regions. To the extent possible, specialised actors should be distinguished (e.g. number of enterprises in specific fields, organisations active in a specific area like clusters or accelerators, university specialisations, etc.). In addition, there should be a description of the status of the framework conditions (e.g. on specific policies available, human capital, targeted financial instruments, etc.).

It is important that the **data collection is personalised for each region**, based on the availability of specific data, as well as the maturity level of the ecosystem. During the data collection several issues can emerge. Some European-wide databases that allow international and interregional comparison are more representative for developed countries or capital cities (e.g. Crunchbase, Dealroom) than more peripheral regions. For nascent regional ecosystems, there is often less granular data available. Regional statistical data

collection varies largely across countries where national statistical offices apply different practices (e.g. for some indicators data will be available only at national level).

The research team may need to be creative in their approach to regional data collection and should make use of different databases as well as interviews with local stakeholders who know the ecosystem.

Table 4 provides a summary of quantitative data sources and Annex A gives further details about the indicators and data sources used for the in-depth mapping performed for the EER regions. Nevertheless, other sources could be considered useful depending on the case or thematic priorities of other regions.

Table 4 Summary of existing quantitative data sources

	Data source	Objective/type of data collected	Regional data can be calculated
Primary data sources	Orbis company database <sup>5</sup>	Identify start-up activity and scale-up activity based on information on employment and number of firms across NACE industry sectors	Yes
	CrunchBase <sup>6</sup> , Dealroom, CBInsights	Provide <b>VC/investment-backed company and start-up information</b> such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Company size class</li> <li>• Location (city and region)</li> <li>• Primary role (firms, group, investor), status (operating, acquired, IPO, or closed) founding date</li> <li>• Dates of the record</li> </ul> Provide <b>risk financing information</b> such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amount of capital involved</li> <li>• Number of investors involved</li> <li>• Type (e.g. VC, business angel, private equity, etc.)</li> </ul>	Headquarters region and location of firms are available  Available information will be limited for less developed regions and other sources are necessary to capture start-up creation
	Horizon 2020 dashboard	Participation data and information on the RTD capacity across the regions and on strategic themes which are a basis for identifying complementarities and synergies, and for designing action plans for cooperation	Yes
	World Bank's Entrepreneurship Database	Source providing comparable cross-country data on new business registration in order to	No

<sup>5</sup> Orbis company database available at <https://www.bvdinfo.com/en-gb/our-products/data/international/orbis>

<sup>6</sup> Databases accessible mainly upon subscription available at <https://www.crunchbase.com/>; <https://dealroom.co/>; <https://www.cbinsights.com/>

	Data source	Objective/type of data collected	Regional data can be calculated
		cope with private company dynamics	
	<b>OECD Entrepreneurship Index</b>	Collection of indicators on entrepreneurship, harmonised on a international level	No
	<b>Flash Eurobarometer Survey</b>	Comparative assessment of entrepreneurship development among EU countries and with non-EU countries	No
	<b>Innovation Radar<sup>7</sup></b>	European Commission initiative to identify high potential innovations and innovators in EU-funded research and innovation framework programmes	Yes
	<b>Invest Europe<sup>8</sup></b>	Database on angel/VC funding at EU level	Yes
<b>Secondary data sources</b>	<b>Regional Ecosystem Scoreboard<sup>9</sup></b>	Identifies, describes and captures the quality of conditions in the regional ecosystem (part of the European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform)	Yes
	<b>Regional Innovation Scoreboard<sup>10</sup></b>	Comparative assessment of innovation performance among EU Member States based on regional statistical facts	Yes
	<b>Regional Competitiveness Index<sup>11</sup></b>	Overview of the territorial competitiveness at a regional level; emphasis on regions' strengths and weaknesses	Yes
	<b>RIS3 Platform</b>	Monitoring of implementation of RIS3 policies	Yes
	<b>Startup Genome<sup>12</sup></b>	Mapping of ecosystems and development of composite indices on ecosystem performance	

<sup>7</sup> Innovation Radar: <https://www.innoradar.eu/>

<sup>8</sup> Invest Europe: <https://www.investeurope.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> Regional Ecosystem Scoreboard: <https://interactivetool.eu/EASME/RES/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> Regional Innovation Scoreboard: [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/innovation/regional\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/industry/policy/innovation/regional_en)

<sup>11</sup> See DG Regio, 2019, RCI: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/information/publications/working-papers/2019/the-european-regional-competitiveness-index-2019](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/information/publications/working-papers/2019/the-european-regional-competitiveness-index-2019)

<sup>12</sup> Startup Genome: <https://startupgenome.com/>

	Data source	Objective/type of data collected	Regional data can be calculated
	<b>European Cluster Collaboration Platform<sup>13</sup></b>	Mapping and ranking of clusters in Europe, including by thematic specialisation and type of membership	Yes
	<b>Global Entrepreneurship Monitor<sup>14</sup></b>	Focus on the link between entrepreneurship and economic development; measurement of differences in the level of entrepreneurial activity among countries	No
	<b>Regional Entrepreneurship and Development Index</b>		REDI yes

Source: Technopolis Group

### 2.3.2 Capturing cross-regional flows

**Capturing cross-regional flows** is a next step in the data collection and analysis, which can provide further insights into existing regional interlinkages of start-ups, universities or policy actors. Such cross-regional analysis will capture firstly the openness of the region in terms of specific aspects such as research collaboration, skills mobility or foreign investment and secondly, the direction of the flows and collaboration patterns. The following dimensions can be distinguished:

- *Technology flows* – analysed through patent data, R&D collaboration
  - Co-patents represent patent applications submitted in R&D collaborations and opting for co-ownership of jointly created innovation. The location of the applicants can provide insight about the R&D networks to which regional actors are connected.
  - Horizon 2020 data provides a proxy for measuring the regional entrepreneurial dynamics in terms of research and technology development (RTD) capacities. Data on participation in Horizon 2020 can be used to provide insights on the RTD capacity across labelled EER regions and on strategic themes, which are a basis for identifying complementarities and synergies, and for designing action plans for cooperation.
- *Investment flows* – analysed through venture capital investment data
  - Acquisitions and mergers provide information about the location of investors, acquirers and acquired firms and hence can reflect the source of main foreign investments and targets of domestic investment abroad.
- *Trade flows* – analysed through regional and national statistics, where available

<sup>13</sup> European Cluster Collaboration Platform: <https://www.clustercollaboration.eu/>

<sup>14</sup> Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: <https://www.gemconsortium.org/>

- *Skills flows* – analysed through regional and national statistics, where available

### 2.3.3 Lessons learned for improved ecosystem analysis

Lessons learned during the data collection and analysis process, **from the initial mapping to cross-regional analysis**, include the following:

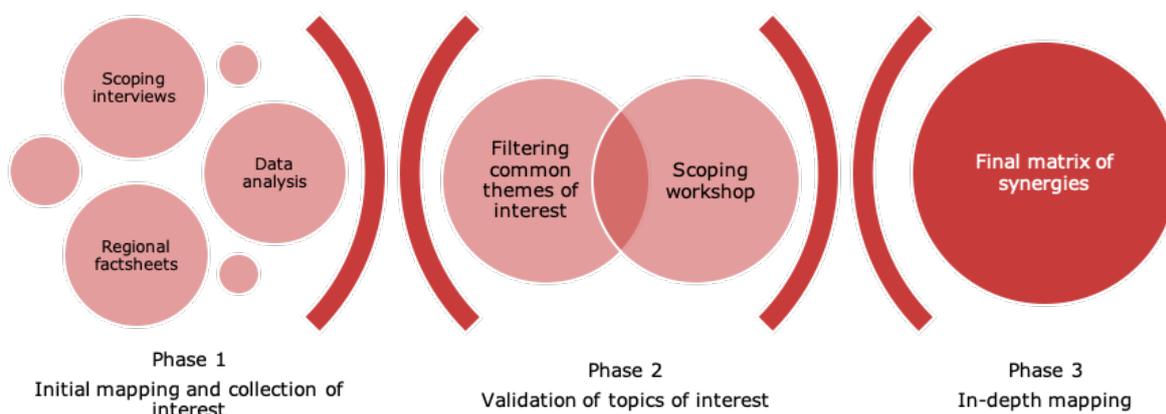
- It is important to focus the data collection on the relevant indicators and not overload the users with too many indicators; careful selection is key, especially for priority areas for thematic and horizontal cooperation.
- Being creative and persistent with the data collection is necessary; some ecosystems do not have sufficient data readily available. Researchers need to collect data on-site, either through interviews, or, where time and resources allow it, through targeted surveys with stakeholders.
- The research should find a balance between collecting data that are available and are comparable across a broader coverage of European regions and specific data to the individual regions but still relevant for the regional mapping.
- Determining the success factors of the ecosystem relies not only on a quantitative data analysis process but requires a qualitative data interpretation and cross-checking/validation with the regional stakeholders.

## 2.4 Mapping cross-regional synergies between different regional ecosystems

This section shows how the ecosystem analysis framework can be applied to analysing individual regions and interregional ecosystems. The process has been replicated within the EER project fostering collaboration among ten entrepreneurial regions. Below we provide examples of the results of the mapping of cross-regional synergies. Figure 10 provides an overview of the steps followed in the process.

It is important to note that this process needs to take place at least in the span of three to six months, in order to allow time for the stakeholders to be contacted, meetings to be organised and the reporting to be performed in a thorough manner. The process is recommended to be performed by an experienced independent researcher, who has an external view of the region and can reach evidence-based and less biased conclusions.

Figure 10 Towards defining the matrix of synergies to find priority topics for cooperation



Source: Technopolis Group

### **Phase 1 – Initial mapping and collection of interest for cooperation**

As portrayed above, the first step is to conduct an initial mapping and scoping of each of the entrepreneurial ecosystems. The regional experts conducted an initial **desk research** in order to review the status and collect a list of documents to be used during the mapping and scoping exercises. The desk research included a review of the following items:

- Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialisation (RIS3)<sup>15</sup> strategy, most recent SWOT analysis
- Recent studies on value chain analysis in the region
- List and map of key regional stakeholders in the entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Map of the existing business support services related to the topics of interest

**Scoping interviews** are a good source for the regional experts to better familiarise themselves with the region. The objective of these interviews is to learn more about the existing strategies and RIS3 status in the region, existing analysis and studies and specially to understand the first preliminary topics of interest to collaborate on during the project.

An **analysis based on the Regional Ecosystem Scoreboard (RES)** is the next step in the process. The objective of the Scoreboard is to identify, describe and capture the quality of conditions in the regional ecosystem that can foster or eventually hinder the creation of dynamic cross-sectoral collaboration spaces for innovation and entrepreneurship, revealing both enabling and constraining mechanisms. The data of the RES is available through the European Observatory for Clusters and Industrial Change and the European Cluster Collaboration Platform<sup>16</sup>.

An **analysis based on Horizon 2020 data** can also be used to provide a proxy for measuring and comparing RTD capacities and advantages of regions or innovation ecosystems. The participation data in Horizon 2020 helps to provide insights on the RTD capacity in the regions and on strategic themes as the basis for identifying complementarities and synergies, as well as for action plan design.

In the case of the EER project on fostering collaboration among ten European regions, the Horizon 2020 data analysis provides insights on the amounts of EU resources obtained by the regions between 2014-2017 broken down by industries. The data provided insight into the differences among regions in term of size, which can pose a difficulty when identifying complementarities and synergies and drafting the action plans.

Once the preliminary information is collected on each region, a review of common strengths and challenges and the specificities of the ecosystems helps to identify initial areas of mutual interest. This information is matched with the themes mentioned by the interviewees as potentially interesting for initiating interregional cooperation, and then compiled in a first draft matrix of synergies.

### **Phase 2 – Scoping workshop**

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<sup>15</sup> <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/s3-platform>

<sup>16</sup> [www.clustercollaboration.eu](http://www.clustercollaboration.eu)

The initial mapping of potential synergies is validated in a **scoping workshop**. The aim of the workshop is to organise a scoping exercise with the participating EER regions in order to review the results of the initial SWOT analysis and **fine-tune the focus and scope of the mapping of the entrepreneurial ecosystems** and their relevant sub-systems. This will lay the ground for in-depth mapping and the formation of strategic collaboration themes and action plans. The **expected outcome** is an expression of regional interests in a **preliminary set of strategic action themes** in which the regions would like to collaborate.

In order to mobilise the regions towards reaching a common list of preliminary strategic action themes, the first draft matrix of synergies is presented in the workshop. In the context of the workshop, the regions can be guided towards reaching consensus on a first set of themes through a **facilitated participatory discussion process**. The regions need to:

- Present their regional ecosystems' assets and challenges in a pitching session, together with their preferred topics of interest for cooperation.
- Rank the resulting preliminary synergies according to a pre-set form that the project team offers (see Figure 11). In the form, the regions can rank their priority themes of cooperation based on their regional interest and list the regions that have mentioned that theme in their pitches as interesting for cooperation.

Figure 11 Self-assessment form for prioritising regional synergies

Theme	Priority ranking	Regions to work with
A	1	
B	2	
C	3	
D	4	
E	5	
F	6	
G	7	

Source: Technopolis Group

The topics with the largest interest received from regions can be further discussed in break-out sessions, in order to deepen the identification of challenges faced and understand more specific elements for potential cooperation. The break-out session can focus on the following topics to guide the discussion among regions:

- *What are the main reasons that your region is interested in the topic?*
- *What sub-topics would be a priority for your region to develop cooperation on?*
- *What would you see as barriers to EER cooperation in these sub-fields and how could they be overcome?*

- *What would be a priority for research in the in-depth mapping to better expand the understanding of your region's position in the particular field?*

Below is an example of resulting preliminary matrix of synergies, with a list of first themes for cooperation, based on the self-assessment form of the regions.

Figure 12 Example of a first set of preliminary strategic action themes

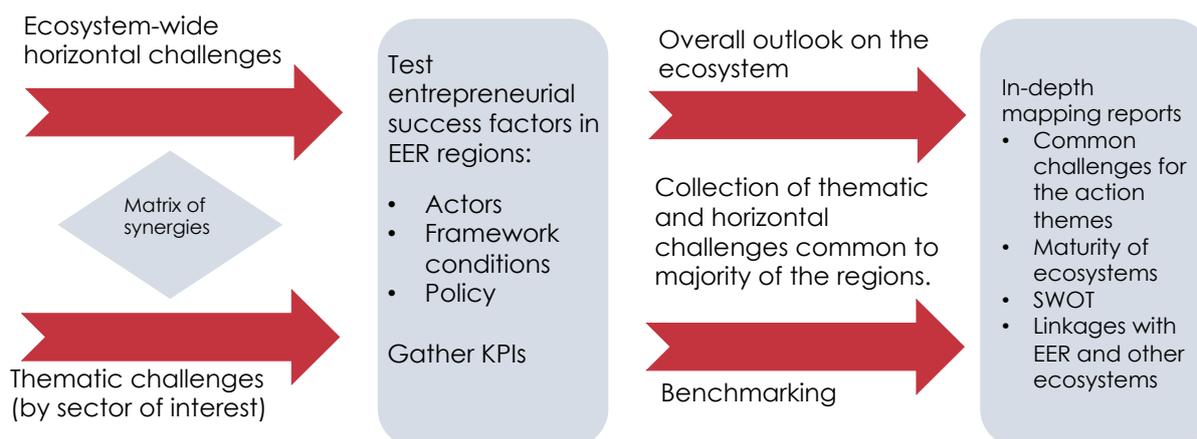
	Area of interest for EER cooperation	Nr of regions
Thematic interest	Digital transformation/Industry 4.0/ADMA/AI & robotics/IoT/smart industry	9
	(Agro)Food/precision farming/valorising food waste	7
	Social economy & entrepreneurship	5
	Bio economy	3
	MedTech/health and wellbeing	4
	Green buildings & building information management	3
	Others (logistics, maintenance, smart mobility, automotive, aerospace)	2
	Tourism	2

Source: Technopolis Group

### Phase 3 – In-depth mapping of the ecosystems and final matrix of synergies

After the first stages of getting to know the regions in the initial mapping, their regional interests and potential for cooperation in broad terms, a more focused stage of work follows, to collect evidence needed to substantiate the themes of common interest mentioned by the regions. For this, an **in-depth mapping report** can be prepared for each region, following the methodologies outlined in Section 2.3. The report analyses the state of each of the actors described above in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, as well as the framework conditions. After that, a policy mix for entrepreneurship as well as a SWOT analysis of the region are provided.

Figure 13 Steps of the process



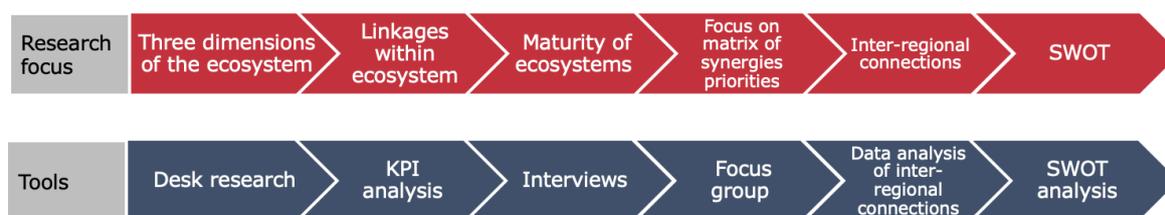
Source: Technopolis Group

The in-depth mapping's starting points are the regions' initial matrix of synergies, developed in the mapping and scoping workshop, as well as the challenges that the region faces – either in specific sectors, or horizontal policy challenges.

The in-depth report structure follows the ecosystem analysis framework developed for the EER project fostering collaboration between ten European regions (see 2.1), in order to understand what are the factors driving the development of regional ecosystems that would like to cooperate. As illustrated in Figure 14, the main points to be researched related to the performance of the ecosystems along the **three main dimensions of success factors (actors, framework conditions, policy)**, as well as the degree of connectivity (linkages) within the ecosystem. In addition, the focus of the report needs to be on the **potential and willingness of the regions to cooperate** in certain fields, through depicting the existing cooperation, and the performance of the ecosystem in the themes selected in the preliminary matrix of synergies. A SWOT analysis and a review of the maturity of the ecosystem help to synthesise the findings of the report. The SWOT and maturity analyses are best developed together with stakeholders in a focus group, so as to collect views and reach a consensus at the level of the region.

The data collection and analysis tools are a typical combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, involving desk research, analysis of the key performance indicators describing the performance of the ecosystem (see Section 2.3 for more details), and qualitative tools such as interviews, focus groups (if considered useful) SWOTs, and analysis of the interregional connections.

Figure 14 Snapshot of the in-depth mapping research focus and tools



Source: Technopolis Group

The results are presented in an individual report per region, in a structure that touches on the main ecosystem success factors and points to areas of interest for cooperation as described in the box below.

Box 1 Structure of the in-depth mapping report

- 1. Executive summary**
- 2. Introduction**
- 3. The actors in the ecosystem**
  - 3.1. The role of entrepreneurs
  - 3.2. Large companies in the entrepreneurial ecosystem
  - 3.3. Research system and universities
  - 3.4. Market services and ecosystem builders
- 4. Framework conditions for entrepreneurship**
  - 4.1. Quick snapshot of the industry and economic performance
  - 4.2. Human capital

4.3. Financial capital

4.4. Infrastructure for local needs and global access

4.5. Culture

**5. Policy mix for entrepreneurship**

5.1. National framework for entrepreneurship support

5.2. Regional development policy

**6. Regional SWOT and conclusions**

6.1. Maturity of the regional ecosystem

6.2. Updated regional SWOT as basis for interregional collaborations

Source: Technopolis Group

**Summary of cross-regional synergies**

As a last step of the mapping of cross-regional synergies, a summary report of the identified cross-regional synergies is prepared. The synthesis of the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem mappings identifies the common challenges, the gaps and explores potential linkages along different thematic areas.

*To provide some insights, the common regional challenges of entrepreneurial ecosystems have been identified in the first phase of the project:*

**'Hunger for talent'**: There is a mismatch between the needs of entrepreneurs and the available workforce in terms of the necessary skills to weather the storm of digital and other advanced technologies. The lack of knowledge capacities is apparent especially in the area of technologies and strategic management and planning. In particular, university spin-off companies are technically strong but lack business education and start-up management skills. Recruitment of skilled employees is not just a challenge for start-ups, but it is seen as the main obstacle for firms wishing to scale up and transition into a high-growth phase.

**'Retaining talent'**: It has been often highlighted that entrepreneurs tend to move to more central locations, hence the retention of start-ups and keeping talented staff is important. A key challenge for companies is to offer competitive salaries/remuneration packages to talented individuals. It is problematic for start-ups to pay high wages and in general they do not have enough financial resources to attract, hire and maintain them.

**'Finance larger ticket sizes'**: There is a lack of appropriate means of finance and investors willing to offer the larger ticket sizes that the scale-ups would need to expand operations (inside or beyond their regions). This has been a finding for both mature ecosystems and nascent or evolving ones. Average ticket size is also still considerably lower in Europe than in the US. Scale-ups tend to leave the region to find funding elsewhere. Venture capital investment by foreign investors also has the potential risk of exposing companies to a buy-out and increasing the outflow of regional strengths and innovation.

**'Low ratio of Series B'**: Series B fundraising generally takes place when the company has accomplished certain milestones in developing its business and is past the initial start-up stage. EER regions have a low ratio of Series B fundraising compared to Series A fundraising (much more common in the US and Silicon Valley), which translates into the creation of start-ups with a lower economic impact.

**'Going beyond regional markets'**: Further factors impeding companies' growth include the relatively small size of the regional markets and difficulties with internationalisation and access to international markets. Sometimes, this challenge is connected to the entrepreneurial culture in some regions, where entrepreneurs prefer to stay local.

**'Red tape'**: Excessive administration and start-up costs are still key barriers. In some cases, social security costs are too high, which puts entrepreneurs off. In other cases, there are too many steps necessary to open a business which complicate a would-be entrepreneur's life. High taxation is also an issue when firms pay half of their earnings as tax, leaving fewer resources for daily operations or to earmark for (re)investment.

**'Dividing IP rights'**: A common difficulty is related to the division of IP rights between the research and private sector, as well as licensing rules. There can be ambiguity in terms of how IP is filed by spin-offs versus the university or research centre, with spin-offs reportedly facing resistance from universities in taking their patents to the market (e.g. through challenging clauses on minimal sale, number of products, etc.).

**'Linking large companies to start-ups'**: Medium-to-large companies are perceived as not engaging sufficiently in regional entrepreneurship support. In many cases start-up companies are reluctant to work with 'corporates' because they are afraid that their technology would be absorbed into large companies. They also fear that large companies will exploit their innovation capacities and the results emanating from the collaboration, for example by dismissing staff during a buy-out move. Even if large companies offer mentors to help start-ups grow, they may be senior experts in a certain field but not have entrepreneurship expertise per se, raising questions about the quality of the advice.

**'Low level of support specific to scale-ups'**: Another problem is that many of the public financing schemes or private business services are offered to start-ups but not to scale-ups yet. There is a perceived low availability of specialised services for scale-ups (both private and public), even in more advanced ecosystems. There seems to be a lack of experienced entrepreneurs who have scaled up their business to support and share expertise with other entrepreneurs that want to follow suit.

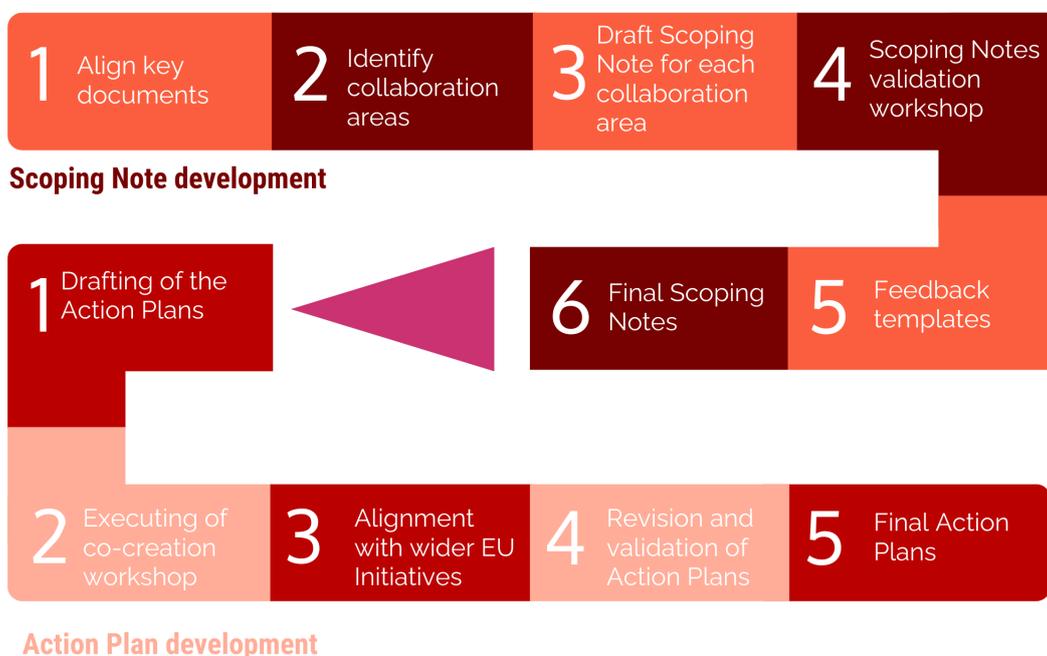
**'Safeguarding industrial niches'**: Industrial niche activities can be very important for regions that are not necessarily based on technologies or research. These activities are not seen as the target of start-up support in certain cases, which is biased towards advanced technological innovations.

### 3 DESIGNING INTERREGIONAL ACTION PLANS

This chapter provides an overview of how to operationalise the ideas, needs for action and themes of interest collected within the in-depth mapping and matrix of synergies that have been developed within the first stage of ecosystem mapping. Figure 15 gives a snapshot of the step-by-step process of designing interregional Action Plans, while the next chapters provide short lessons learned from the EER project mapping and connecting of the ten regional ecosystems.

Figure 15 Designing process of interregional Action Plans

## Designing interregional action plans



Source: Technopolis Group

#### 3.1 Drivers for interregional collaboration

First, it is important to understand and underline the rationale for collaborating beyond the borders of one's region. Why would regions engage in interregional collaborations? Key to successful cooperation is tackling regions' real needs. In general, the literature identifies different key drivers and needs for interregional collaboration such as:

- Policy learning/alignment
- Access to missing competences
- Reaching critical mass
- Access to wider community of potential end-users

- Reducing duplication, redundancies and/or costs
- Increasing efficiency in policy development and implementation

**Building on the positive results of the EER award.** EER regions have experienced the positive benefits of the EER award, such as improved stakeholder behaviour and RDI investments, as well as increased numbers of innovative start-ups and scale-ups in their regions. Building on that experience, regions are eager to move from project-based to 'holistic' collaboration that is not only technology but also policy driven.

In addition, there is a **need to tap into expertise that may not be available in the region as well as the need to join forces for more effective policies**, facilitated by the internet and lowering transport costs, has increased transregional and transnational mobility. Not only do start-ups seek new markets outside their regions, they also build on the possibilities enabled through the Single Market and contract experts, find capital and relocate part of their activities within the EU.

The supportive ecosystem and policymakers can support entrepreneurs in their efforts to go beyond their regional borders. The **most progressive policymakers encourage and support the globalisation of their start-ups**. The Nordic countries, the Euroregion, the Vanguard Initiative, to name a few, see advantages in linking their entrepreneurs.

The interlinking should **investigate the potential of synergies based on interregional interactions, complementing missing nodes** or linkages at the regional level, as well as the role such interlinkages can play in enlarging the market and helping entrepreneurs to go global. Linkages between the European Entrepreneurial Regions can be seen as an opportunity for growth and jobs, helping to keep start-ups from moving away to established hubs.

In addition to lacking nodes, policymakers in entrepreneurial regions can investigate the possibilities of joining forces to support promising entrepreneurs through **common schemes, thus enlarging potential markets and sharing risks**. Such schemes can in particular take the form of:

- Cooperating research and innovation infrastructures
- Common innovative procurement (i.e. identify regional needs and specifying functionalities that cover the needs of the public sector)
- Joint training and mentoring schemes with specific missions and visions organised for two or more regions (a model for the re-emerging mission-oriented innovation policies)

**Looking forward, interregionally.** Increasing policy support for interregional collaboration, such as the Thematic Smart Specialisation Platform (TSSP), the Vanguard Initiative, Interreg Europe, Technical Assistance Facility (TAF) and the so-called 'I3 Interregional Innovation Investments' has prompted regions to explore opportunities with other entrepreneurial regions.

### **3.2 Process of designing interregional Strategic Action Plans**

The process of designing interregional Strategic Action Plans involves the following key steps:

- Defining and outlining Strategic Action Themes in Scoping Notes, based on the insights from the in-depth mapping phase

- Developing Action Plans, including collaborative actions and monitoring

The following section highlights the main process steps with indications on priority elements during each stage.

### 3.2.1 Defining and outlining Strategic Action Themes in Scoping Notes

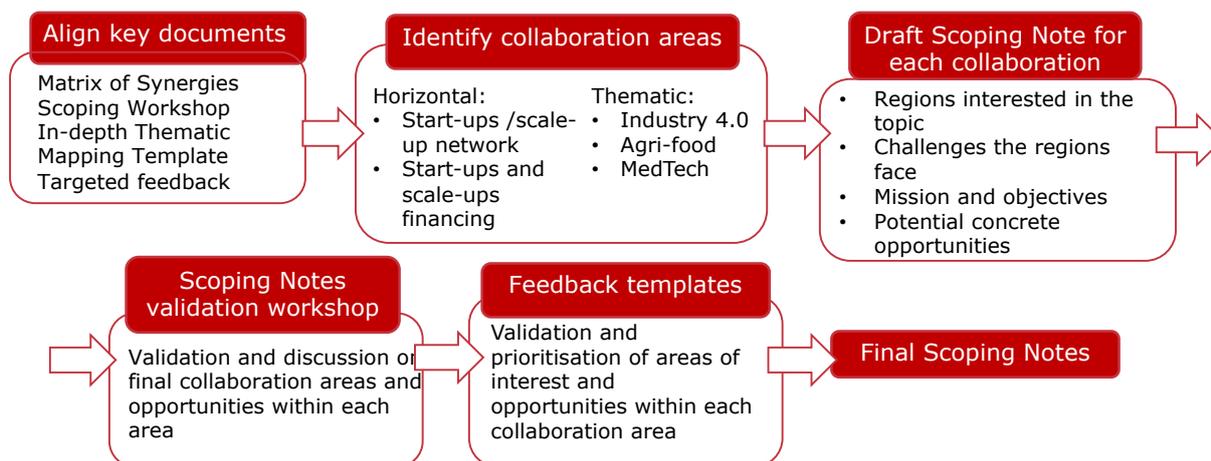
**Finding common collaboration opportunities.** The process of defining and outlining Strategic Action Themes involves a series of key steps. Guidance on these steps and key points of attention are further detailed in this section.

The overall process, as presented in Figure 16, includes:

- *Gathering relevant inputs from the mapping phase*
- *Choosing Strategic Action Theme(s)*
- *Synthesising information in Scoping Notes*

Validation and regional feedback are important in preparing, but also revising the Scoping Notes to reflect the common interests of the regions in the Strategic Action Themes.

Figure 16 Key process steps for Scoping Note development



Source: IDEA Consult

**Alignment with mapping.** The first phase of the Strategic Action Plan development involves various steps that are essential to the preparation of the Strategic Action Themes, hence an alignment between the Strategic Action Themes is vital. The key elements of the mapping phase that feed into the Strategic Action Theme development include:

- Initial and in-depth mapping to identify the specific regional interests, and more specific regional expertise, including the initial so-called 'Matrix of Synergies' that collects broad areas of interest which are common across the regions
- Cross-regional synergies report, as presented above

**Selecting common Strategic Action Themes.** Moving from mapping to matching requires the analysis of mapping data in view of an initial identification of potential synergies between regions. This step requires close consideration of the possible Strategic Action Themes during and following the in-depth mapping phase. Based on the insights gained during the initial and in-depth mapping together with the interregional synergies

report, the top five (or top ten) common priority areas of interest for the regions can be identified as the Strategic Action Themes of the project.

As an example from the EER project, during the initial phase two types of collaboration areas have been identified, notably: (i) thematic and (ii) horizontal. Both areas demonstrated an interest in and a potential for the regions to engage in interregional cooperation. Thematic themes are outlined to include terms such as Industry 4.0/digitalisation of industry, MedTech, and Agri-food, among others at a broad level of granularity. Horizontal themes include subjects such as access to finance, skills gaps, employment and mobility, including soft landing packages for entrepreneurs going cross-border, cooperation and exchanges between entrepreneurs/incubators/investors, among others. The final Strategic Action Themes were identified as:

- Horizontal:
  - Access to finance to start-ups and scale-ups
  - Network start-up/scale-up support
- Thematic:
  - Agri-food
  - MedTech
  - Industry 4.0/digital transformation

**Synthesising information in Scoping Notes.** The relevant information on each Strategic Action Theme should be synthesised into so-called 'Scoping Notes'. Within the EER project interlinking ten European regions, the following aspects were key in this process, emphasising the **iterative aspect** of such cooperation:

- **Using the Scoping Notes to come to the right granularity.** Scoping is clearly one of the most important steps in the process. The 'scope' of the Strategic Action Theme needs to be defined at the right level, i.e. it should be specific enough to trigger the interest of regional actors and industry, but it should be transversal enough to remain relevant for many companies and regions. By combining regional information on their ambitions, challenges, strengths and actors, more granular synergies between regions, segments of value chains, and actors can be detected.
- **An overview of the Strategic Action Theme.** A Scoping Note should be prepared for each Strategic Action Theme. The Scoping Note document contains a further definition and detailing of the proposed area for collaboration. Each note identifies the regions interested in the topic, the challenges the regions face, the mission and the objectives of the collaboration, as well as the potential concrete opportunities for strategic collaboration.
- **Presentation/workshop.** A Scoping Note validation workshop is useful for representatives of the regions who want to establish cooperation. The focus of the workshop revolves around the presentations of areas with cooperation potential, as identified in the Scoping Notes. In the case of the EER project, in the scoping workshop organised in Brussels, both the two horizontal areas of collaboration and the three thematic collaboration areas were presented. Regions provided feedback and insights on the specific Scoping Notes as they were presented. The information provided, as well as the discussion held during the workshop, fed into the drafting of the Action Plans of the collaboration areas.
- **Validation.** A template was designed for each of the Scoping Notes to allow the regions to give feedback and inputs into those collaboration areas they participated in.

Feedback templates were collected, and comments were integrated into the final Scoping Notes.

- **Identify initial actions and their expected effort.** In the Scoping Note development, initial actions need to be developed in order to kick start the Action Plan development, based on common regional interests. The expected effort should be indicated to highlight the resources that would be required to prepare a specific action. This step is particularly useful to distinguish actions from one another, e.g. best practice exchanges (low effort) vs. setting up a platform (high effort).
- **Alignment of the Scoping Notes.** In view of the subjects of certain Strategic Action Themes, it is important to ensure that the topics are aligned across all Scoping Notes. A joint discussion among all Scoping Note leaders is necessary to explore jointly which types of actions can be identified within each Strategic Action Theme and to align these, as in the example of the Table 5 below. Final decisions on which areas are covered by which collaboration opportunity (e.g. money/budget related topics go in the finance Scoping Note) should be agreed upon in order to proceed with the Action Plan development.

Table 5 Matrix to allow for the alignment of identified actions in Scoping Notes

Action	Agri-food	MedTech	Industry 4.0	Network	Financing
A Exchange experiences	x		x	x	
B Scale-up support		x	x		
C Digitalisation	x	x	x		
D etc.			x		x

Source: IDEA Consult

### 3.2.2 Developing Action Plans, including collaborative actions and monitoring

**Kicking off the Action Plan work.** Following the finalisation of the Scoping Note, the Action Plan process should be launched to outline how the proposed Strategic Action Theme would become a collaboration opportunity across EER regions. The types of potential actions are presented in Figure 17.

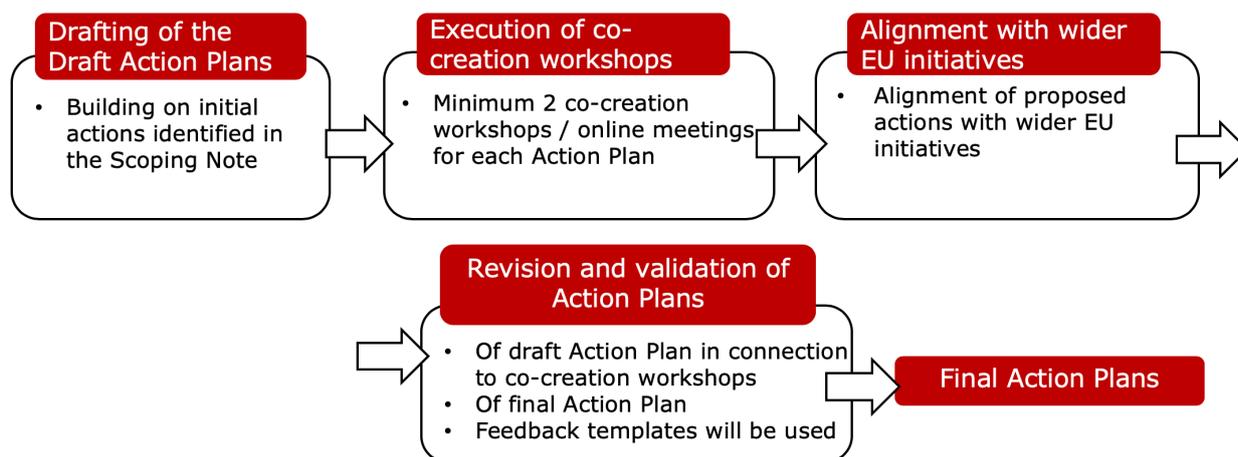
Figure 17 Types of Actions for interregional cooperation



Source: IDEA Consult

These action types are used to guide the Action Plan process, which include the following process steps as depicted in Figure 18:

Figure 18 Key process steps for the Action Plan development



Source: IDEA Consult

**Building on initial actions identified in the Scoping Note.** Each Action Plan should depart from actions initially identified in the Scoping Note. These can be used to organise the first discussions with regions.

**Online meetings to foster regular exchange.** Online meetings are used as co-creation workshops with the regions and were organised as interactive sessions with a brainstorming and co-creation element. In practice, in the EER project, the initial online meetings served as an opportunity for a first best practice exchange and priority setting among the regions. Operational coordination should be in the hands of the **Action Plan coordinators** (including supporting input material and documenting outputs for the Action Plans). Two to three online meetings can be scheduled for each Action Plan.

**Action Plan drafting.** Action Plans themselves are envisaged to be living documents, accompanying the interregional collaboration opportunity identified, and hence allowing for the uptake and integration of further notions in their lifetime, as determined interesting by the regions participating in them. The drafted Action Plans depart from the action outlined during the Scoping Note phase and are revised throughout the online meetings. Action Plans that cover more granular areas and represent the regional interest, and thus their commitment to the actions, can cover a variety of actions tailored to the regional ecosystems' needs. Examples from the actions identified in the EER projects include:

- Network start-up/scale-up support
- Soft landing scheme for start-ups/scale-ups
- Financing schemes supporting scale-ups

- Approaches, practices and methods to support the digital transition of industrial SMEs
- Agri-food: approaches to data sharing and reduction of food waste loss
- Digital health start-up exchange scheme – connecting start-ups to healthcare institutions

The suggested structure of the Action Plans is presented in Box 2 below.

*Box 2 Suggested structure of the Action Plans*

**Action Plan structure**

1. Introduction
  2. Objectives
  3. Actions
    - 3.1. Overview and initial actions
    - 3.2. Specific actions for this Action Plan
      - 3.2.1. Action 1:
      - 3.2.2. Action 2:
      - 3.2.3. Action 3: Actions towards the renewal period
  4. Time frame (Gantt Chart)
    - 4.1. Milestones
    - 4.2. Timeline per action
      - 4.2.1. Action 1:
      - 4.2.2. Action 2:
      - 4.2.3. Action 3: Actions towards the renewal period
  5. Funding of the proposed actions
  6. Key performance indicators and monitoring
  7. Next steps
- Annexes

- **Outlining the right actions.** The online meetings as well as other offline or bilateral interactions are key to identifying and detailing the 'right' actions. Between the Scoping Note and Action Plan development, some Action Plans can experience a change in scope, whether it is due to a fine-tuning or a reordering in view of regional priorities. An **additional scoping and mapping at the level of designing pilots for testing the actions** may be needed in a lot of cases: when investigating more in-depth interregional collaboration, 'gaps' in competencies, capabilities, value chain segments etc. may be revealed.
- **Identification and finalisation of proposed actions.** Proposed actions for each Action Plan can vary depending on the initiative and interest gained by the regions. The actions are revised in a Draft Action Plan based on the completed online meetings with the regions and the discussions and feedback that take place therein. Suggestions for designing actions can include:
  - **Allow for multiple layers of activity:** Include short-, medium- and long-term actions.

- **Identify specific calls and submitting proposals:** For actors from regions to apply to a call together (see Scoping Note funding opportunities and make them more specific to proposed collaboration area).
- **Sharing practices/information exchange:** Establish what to organise if it is not already done. Include information on actions already carried out in order to track progress.
- **Connecting companies:** It may be interesting to connect companies from regions who may then collaborate further on joint projects.
- **Organise study visits.** To better understand the potential challenges/benefits of including some activities within the Action Plans, study visits can be useful.
- **Join ongoing activities/existing initiatives:** Specify which are relevant, e.g. Vanguard Initiative, Ecsel<sup>17</sup>, ADMA Initiative<sup>18</sup>, among others.
- **Validation and revision.** Feedback templates then need to be prepared to accompany the Draft Action Plans and allow regions to provide their input. Each region is asked to provide feedback to each draft Action Plan in which they are involved, which serves as the basis for the Action Plan revision. In addition, the finalisation of the Action Plans should include an alignment across different Action Plans, for the content they include as well as the style in which they are prepared. During the closing workshop, a final discussion and validation of the Action Plans took place to enable the regions to discuss and understand the way forward for the proposed areas.

**Execution of initial actions.** Some actions could already be executed within the Action Plan development. These include actions such as best practice exchanges, and exchanging of experiences, as well as initial analysis of relevant EU initiatives with which the project could connect. The Action Plan development also allows for coordination and monitoring work. Further details on these aspects are elaborated here:

- **Exchanging regional experiences.** During the online meetings, and in order to foster relationship-building between the stakeholders, the initially proposed actions to exchange experiences are already carried out. In addition to giving the regions a better understanding of other regions' expertise, challenges and needs in the specific Action Plan area, these exchanges also lay the groundwork for identifying further actions within the respective Action Plans.
- **Alignment with existing EU initiatives.** Following the initial actions identified, and online meetings to refine and align the scope, some initial actions can be executed including the identification and alignment with similar European initiatives related to the proposed action. Relevant initiatives to check included:
  - Vanguard Initiative partnerships
  - Thematic Smart Specialisation Partnerships
  - European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) – Knowledge & Innovation Communities (KICs)
  - Interreg projects
  - Horizon 2020 projects
  - European Research Area Networks (ERA-Nets)

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<sup>17</sup> Ecsel, more information available at <https://www.ecsel.eu/>

<sup>18</sup> ADMA Initiative, more information available at <http://www.adma.ec/>

- Public Private Partnerships (PPP)/Joint Undertakings (JU)
- European Cluster Collaboration Platform
- Enterprise Europe Network
- Digital Innovation Hubs
- Advanced Technology Centres
- Other relevant existing networks and platforms
- **Implementing coordination and monitoring frameworks.** While most of the resources would go to further developing the Action Plans, it is important to set aside time/resources for coordination efforts, to ensure coherence in the approach and links with the regional commitment. This includes a monitoring system with specific indicators to assess the pace of progress of the projects identified. In addition, if needed, it may be important to include measures to stop some of the actions, while concentrating the support on the most promising ones.

### 3.3 Transversal learning

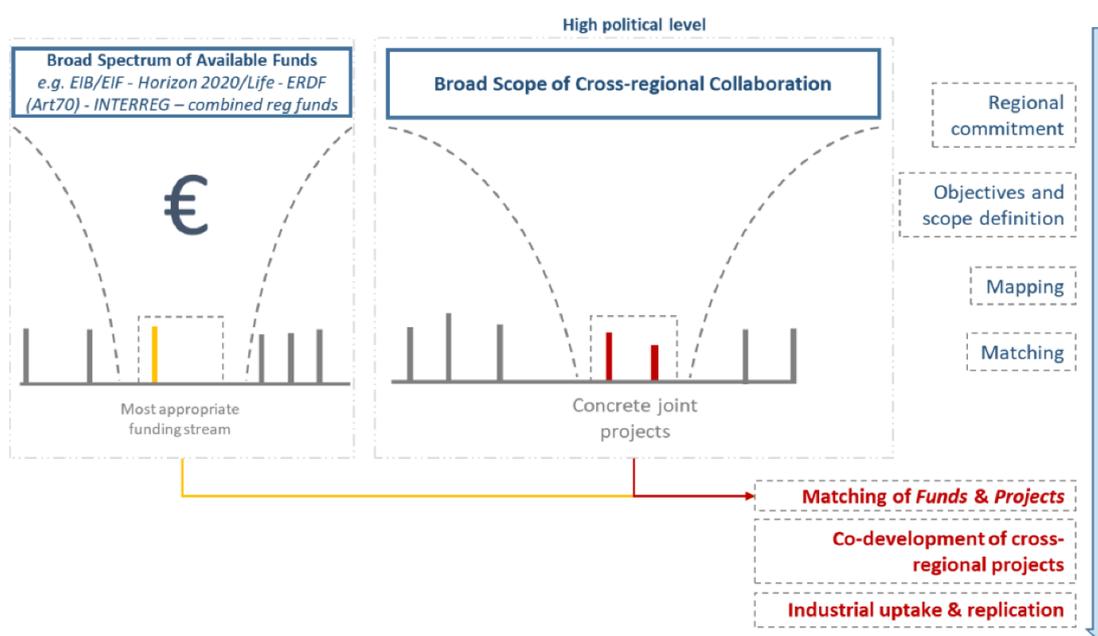
Throughout the process carried out to realise the Action Plans, a series of transversal learnings can take place. Transversal learnings refer to aspects of importance along the way, including multiple process steps, such as:

- **Thematic and horizontal themes.** A balance and good mix of thematic and horizontal areas is needed. That being said, it is equally important to distinguish various processes (i.e. clearly distinctive specific dynamics). Horizontal areas should be thematically neutral, if possible, with thematic areas used as test cases for horizontal areas.
- **Regional commitment, throughout all stages, remains key.** Regional commitment is the starting point of any interregional partnership. Commitment can take on many forms (i.e. set up a specific legal entity, signing a memorandum of understanding, having an open or closed partnership, among others), however it is important to check and reinforce regional commitment based on the specific needs of the region and the Action Plan and its stage of development. Some good practices to consider are:
  - **Do not expect (or require) a formal commitment too early:** It is important to allow time to explore and test interaction between regions and their actors. Thus, allow for experimentation at the beginning but focus the experimentation on the common scope, challenges, needs, etc.
  - **Minimum number of regions to form a collaboration:** There is no ideal number of regions for any partnership, depending on the topic chosen. Within the EER project, the minimal critical mass was defined to contain at least three regions to explore a collaboration area, where each Action Plan contains at least five regions at present.
  - **Engagement of the 'right' stakeholders in the Scoping Note process and Action Plan development:** Regional participation will vary in the course of the partnership's life cycle. For example, policy officers will tend to be heavily involved at the beginning, followed by technology experts and then industry managers, cluster managers and technology experts, with the latter two especially important for the thematic Action Plans.
  - **Renewing commitment.** While further developing pilots of the actions proposed, it is important to renew the commitment because regional interests at partnership

level may differ once work is underway at a lower level, i.e. at the level of the Action Plan. It is also very important to prepare the pilots carefully so they perform their role, which is to lead and scope out the Action Plan process.

- Identifying funding opportunities in line with the proposed Action Plans.** As shown in Figure 19, for the success of the partnership, it is paramount that the search for funding starts at the earliest stage possible (i.e. right at the Scoping Note stage), exploring what is needed and available among the regions, not necessarily what is fundable. The search for funding goes way beyond EU funding and involves also combined/pooled/aligned regional funding, private funding or other types of public funding (i.e. EIB-like types of debt/equity funding) that are closer to market. Initial funding streams are identified in the Scoping Note and refined in the Action Plan.

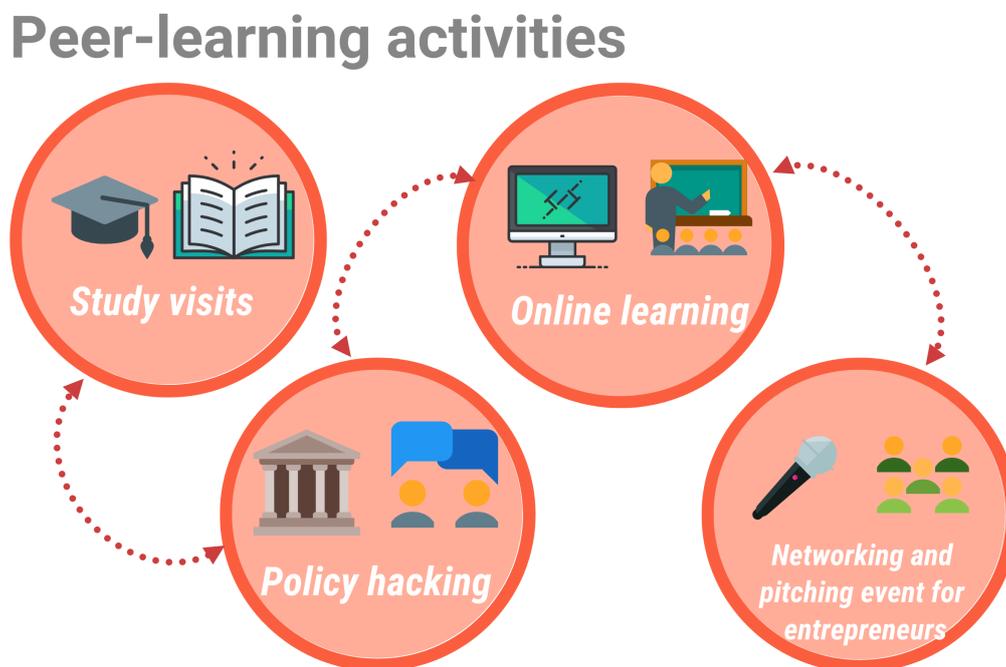
Figure 19 Parallel scoping of funding opportunities for the proposed Action Plans



Source: IDEA Consult

## 4 PEER-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Figure 20 Peer-learning activities



### 4.1 Organising study visits

These practice-oriented learning activities are designed to enhance knowledge exchange between regional ecosystem players dealing with similar challenges, and to foster the sharing of best practices and experience among entrepreneurs from different European regions and cities.

A key strength of the process is that – as peers – they can readily understand the goals of the stakeholders whom they visit and meet, their day-to-day activities and the complexity of their environment. This is really a process of learning and exchange. Peers share their wealth of knowledge with staff from the **business support organisations (BSO)** and entrepreneurs that they visit and meet. They take back to their regions knowledge from the places they visit and the people they meet, strengthening their understanding. This activity thus offers them an opportunity to exchange skills and experiences, and to reflect on their own work and situation.

In the framework of the project linking ten European EER awarded regions, study visits to three business support organisations located in different EER labelled regions were organised. The three cohorts were composed of between five and 12 BSO staff members and entrepreneurs from other EER regions who were eager to learn from their peers in other European regions and potentially set up new working connections/relationships.

Key success factors for a study visit include good preparation, good participation and good feedback! In particular, it is crucial that:

- The call for expression of interest for representatives of individual regions to participate in a visit is clear and detailed enough to form a solid understanding of participants' background and expectations

- There is a balance between theoretical and practical information
- The visits are carried out between peers in a spirit of free exchange and mutual learning, with both sides willing to listen and communicate
- Feedback from participants is effective

In the event of unforeseen events, where interregional visits cannot take place, it is important to explore alternative ways to support the exchange between regions, as this is a key input to developing Action Plans. For example, during the EER project, due to the COVID-19 crisis, all the physical events were cancelled due to social/travel restrictions. The participants expressed their willingness to replace the study visits with online meetings. The project took this opportunity to give the selected entrepreneurs and BSO staff members the chance to learn from each other despite the situation, and to interact as much as possible.

The success factors for a good online meeting are pretty much the same as for a physical study visit: preparation, participation, feedback. It is important to make sure that the presentation is visually appealing. Using lots of images and introducing one topic per slide will help to keep the audience alert and interested in the presentation. Giving the participants enough time at the beginning to introduce themselves and explain why they were interested in joining this event is recommended. A Q&A session at the end is also necessary to engage the audience, so allowing plenty of time at the end of presentations to answer questions is important. After the online meeting, it is important to follow up with event attendees and send a thank you email. It is also useful to ask participants to provide feedback (i.e. a short survey) and rate their experience. In addition, a good practice is to send a recording to people who registered but were unable to attend the webinar, especially if the participants request this in advance. Finally, in order to encourage interactions and collaborations between the participants it is also recommended (with their permission) to share the list of attendees and contact details, respecting data protection and GDPR best practices.

Below are examples of suggested both physical and online study visit agendas:

**Example of a daily draft agenda of a study tour to a business incubator.**

*Figure 21 Physical study visit agenda (two days)*

**Day 1**

9.00 – 12.00

Presentation of the hosting business incubator

12.00 – 13.00

Lunch break

13.00 – 15.30

Meeting with representative of the EER region and introduction of the regions' ecosystem

15.30 – 17.00

Site visit, including possible visit to incubator and other laboratories

**Day 2**

10.00 – 16.00

Meetings and exchange with representatives of 'incubated' companies

17.00 – 17.30

Coffee and networking with the business incubator staff

Source: EBN

*Figure 22 Webinar agenda – replacing study visit (two hours)*

Introduction of the EER project by EER project representative

Roundtable of participants

Presentation from the hosting organisation:

- Mission and programmes
- International relations
- Partners and regional ecosystem
- Start-ups and success stories
- Peer-exchange discussion
- Opportunities for collaboration after and beyond the EER project

➤ Q&A session moderated by EER project representative

Source: EBN

## 4.2 Online learning

**Online meetings to foster regular exchange.** Online meetings can be used as co-creation workshops with the regions and organised as interactive sessions with a brainstorming and co-creation element.

In practice, and in the context of the EER project, the initial online meetings served as an opportunity for a first best practice exchange and priority setting among the regions. Operational coordination should be in the hands of the Action Plan coordinators (including supporting input material and documenting outputs for the Action Plans).

## 4.3 Networking and pitching event for entrepreneurs

Networking is a key tool for entrepreneurs to get their ideas across to investors, potential clients or future employees, as well as for gaining insights in their competitors' products or services, new markets, sources of funding, etc.

Organising events where entrepreneurs can network with a variety of actors can be a key element in promoting a culture of entrepreneurship among regions and creating stronger connections between the actors within an ecosystem and between ecosystems.

Moreover, when a large-scale event is organised, it can make sense to offer the opportunity for selected start-ups to present their businesses to potential funders and investors by including pitching sessions as part of the programme. Below, an example of the pitching event organised within the EER project.

Figure 23 Example of a pitching event

*In the context of the peer-learning activities within the EER project, the European Business and Innovation Centres (EBN) -an open community of business and entrepreneurial support organisations - organised a networking and pitching event (EBN Congress) for entrepreneurs/start-ups from different EER labelled regions, which took place in Rome on 23-25 October 2019.*

*This three-day event was dedicated to the key role of innovation, specialisation, internationalisation, investment and impact as key leverages for the business development and growth of an innovative company. Lively debates were held on some of the key industry sectors, such as fashion tech, sustainable tourism, space, smart manufacturing, nanotechnologies, green economy and social innovation.*

*Twelve start-ups out of 23 from EER regions were selected thanks to a call for expression of interest. The call was open from 26 August until 30 September 2019 and was disseminated by the regions and project partners. EBN also launched targeted communication for this event through its own channels.*

*Beside the opportunity of pitching their ideas/projects/companies in front of Europe's business incubators, investors and other companies, and to receive valuable feedback and recommendations, the participants benefited from:*

- *Full access to the plenary sessions of the EBN Congress*
- *Tips on internationalisation through a dedicated workshop with experts*
- *Dedicated stand in the exhibition area to showcase services and products*
- *A VIP corner to facilitate matchmaking*
- *Networking opportunities with peers, incubators, investors and corporates during the welcome cocktail, networking breaks and lunches*
- *Access to the official EBN Congress Networking Dinner*

Source: EBN

In order to select promising start-ups to pitch at the event, it is recommended to organise a [call for expression of interest](#) and to have clear selection criteria such as:

- Have a registered company in the xxx region/country
- Show proof of concept and market traction
- Show a growth strategy and the potential to scale
- Have a committed and experienced management team
- Have a pitch deck or executive summary of their business plan
- Preferably evidence of pre-seed investment (not mandatory)
- Have a clear funding/financing need

Each member of the selection committee would need to give a score for each start-up – obviously those with the highest marks are selected to pitch. Feedback on the application process (mentioning the reasons behind the selection or rejection) is important.

Investors should be invited according to their area of interest and aligned with the pitching companies. In the EBN case, it was able to draw on a portfolio of known investors that regularly attend its events.

When organising a pitching event, there is a list of important and essential things that should be taken into account to make the event successful:

- Send the list of start-ups to the investors/corporates a few days before the session so that they can get an idea of their sectors and technology readiness level (TRL), and send the list of investors/corporates to the pitching companies for them to get a sense of their audience
- Send a template to the start-ups for their presentations
- Ask to revise them in order to make sure they are consistent and clear enough.
- Ask the pitchers to send their final presentation a few days before the session so that everything is uploaded to the event management system on time
- Run technical tests before the session to avoid any issues during the event
- Hire a great moderator who knows how to deal with this type of event and audience
- Respect the time for the pitches themselves and Q&A – everyone should benefit from the same time
- Send a follow-up survey after the event
- Provide a quiet room where the pitchers and investors/corporates can meet and discuss afterwards

Two of the EER pitching companies received concrete benefits from participating in the pitching session at EBN Congress. One of the pitching companies from the Central Macedonia region ([www.embiots.gr](http://www.embiots.gr)) was approached at the Congress by a representative of [Honeywell International Inc](http://www.honeywell.com) to collaborate and provide them with tailored engineering services. A pitching company from the Flanders region ([www.artassistant.com](http://www.artassistant.com)) was featured as *Entrepreneurs of the Month* on EBN's website and in its newsletter, giving them visibility through the network.

*Box 3 Testimony from ArtAssistant, participants at EBN Congress in Rome*

*"There were a lot of different activities to promote ourselves during the Congress. The one we loved the most was definitively the business-to-business matchmaking with investors and VCs, as we are currently searching for funding. Workshops and lectures, designed exclusively for start-ups, were really educational as well! All of the activities that centred around networking were essential to spread awareness about ArtAssistant. We also had the opportunity to pitch the platform during the Congress at a session that was funded by the EER project and the European Commission where we [received] feedback from the audience, mainly EU/BICs, investors, and coaches. It is a good initiative; we are absolutely interested in attending next year in Brussels." (ArtAssistant)*

#### **4.4 Policy hacking**

A policy hack is an adaptation of hackathon.<sup>19</sup> A **policy hack** can be defined as

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<sup>19</sup> A hackathon is a sprint-like event with a set time-frame typically associated with computing and software development, but also involving graphic designers, interface designers, project managers, domain experts, and others collaborating intensively on projects to solve a problem or develop a specific solution. Sometimes hackathons are more open-ended and the format has also been expanded to tackle socio-economic and other challenges.

A tool to develop policies with the goal of solving specific challenges. Participants are grouped into teams, and with the support of mentors, analyse the challenge(s) proposed and develop a set of solutions that address the challenge(s).

It is a collaborative tool to come up with a set of solutions to tackle a predefined challenge or a set of challenges. During the process, the participants are guided by a mentor with skills on the topic whose role is to facilitate the discussion and provide ideas, but not to intervene in their conclusions/solutions the participants arrive at.

Depending on the length of the policy hack, the draft solutions can be presented at the end of the day for shorter sessions (e.g. 'mini' policy hacks), or broken up into two phase for longer sessions; a first validation midway and once again at the end of the day. It is also possible to have a jury assessing the solutions and to offer prizes to the best solutions. The mentors will also provide feedback during the process. It is also advisable to have a moderator/presenter on the day.

The main **benefit** of a policy hack is that participants from diverse backgrounds or from various groups of stakeholders, work together to develop a solution from the ground up. Ideas and proposals benefit from instant feedback and validation, making it a very interactive and robust exercise.

It is important that the policy hack is **designed as a process**, not a one-off event. The policy hack topic should be relevant to the 'problem owner' and, ideally, the results of the event need to be fed into a wider policy framework benefiting ecosystem players.

The **preparation** of a policy hack should start with the identification of the challenge(s) to be addressed. It is important that the challenges can actually be 'hacked' – that they can be somehow solved. There is the option to provide some starter ideas guiding participants towards the type of solutions welcomed, or to leave them completely free to come up with ideas. The organisers should also have an overview of the number and type of participants in the hack, in order to assure medium-sized groups (5-7 participants in each) with different actors working together. Groups composition can be made in advance if the list of participants is known.

A good practice is to send a background note to the participants in advance, presenting the challenge, the objectives of the day and the solutions foreseen, if any. This will help the participants prepare and kick-start discussions on the day.

Figure 24 shows a sample agenda for such a policy hack (timings obviously change depending on the length of the event and the number of groups).

*Figure 24 Draft agenda for a policy hack*

Time	Activity
10 mins	Welcome the participants
30 mins	Presentation of the challenge(s)
180 – 240 mins	Work in teams
45 mins	Presentation of the results/solutions per group
30 mins	Feedback from the jury

Source: Technopolis

The **required materials** include:

- A projector
- A flipchart and markers per group
- Writing paper/pads
- A computer per group (optional) – to prepare slides to present their ideas

*Box 4 Good practices for the organisation of a policy hack*

**Good practices:**

- Provide the participants with a background note before the day of the event
- 5-7 participants per group in order to enhance participation
- Mentors working on the topic to steer the discussion and support their teams
- A full-day event will give the participants more time to propose a solution
- Send a follow-up email with the results of the discussions

Source: Technopolis

In the context of the EER project a mini policy hack was organised. More information on the context, the challenge and the solutions can be found in the Annex B.

Anyone wishing to learn more about policy hacks in the context of entrepreneurial ecosystems can consult the [Playbook prepared by the Start Up Nation](#) for ideas and inspiration.

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## APPENDIX A: INDICATOR FRAMEWORK

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Collection process</i>	<i>Optional (1)</i>
<b>ACTORS</b>	<b>Role of entrepreneurs</b>	Landscape of enterprises in the region	Nr of enterprises per sector of activity; employment per sector of activity	QT	Eurostat	Core
		Number of start-ups	Existence of critical mass overall and by sectors share of start-ups by sector in total start-ups	QT	Combined approach: Orbis based data combined with interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce	Core
		Innovative start-ups	# per 1000 people	QL-QT (listing)	Interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce	Core
		Number of scale-ups	Share of scale-ups by sector in total scale-ups	QT	Combined approach: Orbis-based data combined with interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce	Core
		Scale-ups leaving the region	Listing	QL	Interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce	Optional
		Rate of failure of start-ups	Share in total start-ups	QT and QL	interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce; Eurostat for the regions included in business demography data	Optional
		Number of failed entrepreneurs restarting	Share in total failed entrepreneurs	QT	Business registries analysis interviews with regional authorities; accelerators; associations	Optional depends on the availability

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Collection process</i>	<i>Optional (1)</i>
						of data by region
		Entrepreneurial density proxied by: Entrepreneurial intentions; expecting to start a new business in the next three years Perception of good opportunities to start a business in the area where you live	Share in total firms	QT	GEM	Optional
		IPOs	Share in total firms (last five years)	QT-QL (listing)	desk research + interviews with accelerators, incubators	Core
	<b>Large companies and industrial fabric</b>	Number of large companies per sector	share in total firms	QT	Combined Eurostat and business registries	Core
		Global Value Chains	GVCs of critical importance for the region What segments does the region miss (that could be complemented from other regions)	QL	interviews with regional authority; industry associations; large companies	Core
		Ownership structure of companies	Extent to which companies have local or foreign ownership; effects on the region (barriers to expanding, working with local suppliers, etc.)	QT-QL	Desk research; interviews with regional authorities, industry associations	Optional

<i><b>Dimension</b></i>	<i><b>Factors</b></i>	<i><b>Indicator</b></i>	<i><b>Measurement</b></i>	<i><b>Type</b></i>	<i><b>Collection process</b></i>	<i><b>Optional (1)</b></i>
		Extent of cooperation of (large) companies with start-ups	# and qualitative information; identification of main companies Large companies offering space incubation/ acceleration to start-ups	QL	Interviews with accelerators/incubators	Core
		Board members/successful entrepreneurs as mentors to start-ups	# and qualitative information	QL	Interviews with accelerators/incubators	Core
	<b>Research system and universities</b>	Leadership in favour of entrepreneurship (organisation of events, resources for TTOs, open labs)	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with regional authorities, research organisations/universities Desk research; check if region/country in HEInnovate resources database	Core
		Regulatory frame of universities and research centres regarding business friendly IP protection	Qualitative information	QL	Desk research	Optional
		Students per population per discipline	Share per discipline in total students	QT	Secondary data (ETER) interviews with universities	Core
		Retention of students per population and discipline	Share in total students (estimate) and qualitative information	QL	Interviews with Universities and research institutes; alumni databases (when available)	Optional
		Organisational rules favouring start-up support	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with university and research centres	Optional
		Incidence on faculty-business exchange/careers	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with university and research centres	Core

<i><b>Dimension</b></i>	<i><b>Factors</b></i>	<i><b>Indicator</b></i>	<i><b>Measurement</b></i>	<i><b>Type</b></i>	<i><b>Collection process</b></i>	<i><b>Optional (1)</b></i>
		Spin-off rate	Number of spin-offs from universities and research centres every year; change to previous year, or just overall trend increasing or not, fast or slow increase	QT-QL	Interviews with university and research centres and regional authorities	Core
		Encouragement of interdisciplinary cooperation	Extent of cooperation of regional universities in R&D projects with other research centres; with companies	QT-QL	Interviews on incentives with Universities and research institutes; cooperation indicators based on patents and horizon 2020 data	Core
	<b>Market services</b>	Type of services available (including any non-for profit, or for profit schemes for mentoring, Coaching entrepreneurs, organised mentors, trainings, etc)	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce and local companies	Core
		Gaps in market services	Qualitative information	QL	interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce & local companies	core
		Companies/start-ups coached by successful entrepreneurs	Qualitative information	QL	interviews with accelerators / incubators	core
		Success rates/ quality of provided market services	Company growth rates and scale up cases	QL	interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce & local companies	core
	<b>Publicly funded support organisations</b>	Availability and quality of public support by type of intermediary	Qualitative information if possible supported by data to measure quality: share of	QL	interviews with regional authorities, accelerators, companies	core

<i><b>Dimension</b></i>	<i><b>Factors</b></i>	<i><b>Indicator</b></i>	<i><b>Measurement</b></i>	<i><b>Type</b></i>	<i><b>Collection process</b></i>	<i><b>Optional (1)</b></i>
			gazelles, number of unicorns, company survival rates.			
		Appropriateness of public support (what they offer, how long start-ups stay in incubation), size, public/private resources and success shares/size of graduating companies	Qualitative information	QL	interviews with regional authorities	core
		Success rates / quality of provided market services	Company growth rates and scale up cases	QT - QL	Secondary data	Core
	<b>Density of actors and interaction and culture</b>	Clusters	# cluster organisations Quality of cluster services	QT	Secondary data interviews with regional authorities, industry associations	Core
		Private clubs and organisations	Qualitative information	QL-QT listing	Interviews with industry associations	Optional
		Public-private networks	Qualitative information;	QL-QT listing	Interviews with industry associations, universities	Optional
		Density of interaction	Nr and scale of start-ups/entrepreneurship/ investor events in the region; nr of communities for entrepreneurs (e.g. on meetup.com; on facebook.com); extent of start-up-corporate cooperation)	QL	Interviews with industry associations, universities, accelerators, regional authorities	Core

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Factors</i>	<i>Indicator</i>	<i>Measurement</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Collection process</i>	<i>Optional (1)</i>
<b>FRAMEWORK CONDITIONS</b>	<b>Human capital</b>	Type of skills missing	Qualitative information	QT	Interviews with regional authorities	Core
		Specialisation of human capital and evidence of changes over time	Top skills available in the region; change in graduates per scientific field	QT-QL	Secondary data and interviews with universities and industry associations	Core
	<b>Financial capital</b>	Investments from business angels, VC, crowdfunding platforms, other	Percent share of GDP	QT	Combined approach: crunch-base, interviews with accelerators, incubators and chambers of commerce, GEM data; percentage of early-stage (TEA) entrepreneurs receiving finance from informal investors, by region, GEM 2015; average amount of money provided by informal investors, by gender and region, GEM 2015); interviews with accelerators	Core
		Financial instruments incl. Structural Funds dedicated to entrepreneurship and SMEs &/ or other publicly backed financial instruments and other regional instruments	share in total public funding	na	Interviews with regional authority and secondary data	Core
		Banking system: access to banking system/loans for innovative companies	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with industry associations to understand the more mature entrepreneurs challenges in accessing banks finance	Optional
	<b>Infrastructure for local needs</b>	ICT infrastructure	Overall fixed broadband and NGA broadband coverage by region; DESI	QT	Secondary data	Optional

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Collection process</b>	<b>Optional (1)</b>
	<b>and global access</b>	5G	Qualitative information on 5G trials	QL	Desk research	Optional
		Transport infrastructure	Transport proxied by regional competitiveness index a composite of:  1) motorway potential accessibility (Spiekermann & Wegener, 2016) 2) Railway potential accessibility (Spiekermann & Wegener, 2016) 3) Number of passenger flights; accessible within 90 minutes drive (Eurostat/EuroGeographics/National Statistical Institutes) 4) Intensity of high-speed railways-UIC, railway operators (EuroGeographics, OpenStreetMap, TomTom, RRG, Eurostat, DG REGIO)	QT	Secondary data	Optional
	<b>Culture</b>	Cultural and social norms towards entrepreneurship	Qualitative information on: -People consider starting business as good career choice -Population claiming to possess the required knowledge/skills to start a business -Population thinking that people attach high status to successful entrepreneurs	QL	Secondary data (GEM)	Core

Fostering collaboration across entrepreneurial ecosystems - Guide to mapping, action plan design and peer learning for regions

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Measurement</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Collection process</b>	<b>Optional (1)</b>
		Tolerance to diversity and openness to external entrepreneurs	Qualitative information	QL	Interviews with regional authorities, incubators, accelerators	Optional
		Existence of "shared mental models" in the ecosystem	Extent to which ecosystem is fragmented / there are tensions, or the community is closely moving towards common goals;	QL	Interviews with regional authorities and accelerators, industry associations	Optional
	<b>Spatial concentration</b>	Extent of geographic concentration of the envisaged EE	Qualitative information	QL	Interview with regional authority	Optional
		EE/hubs within the broader region	Differences between entrepreneurship at city level / rural areas	QL	Interview with regional authority	Optional, only for regions with large areas
	<b>Regional development policy</b>	Existence of a strategy for the EE & RIS3/ regional development	Qualitative information E.g. Is there a quantitative goal by policy? E.g. Number of unicorns/gazelles; number of start-ups overcoming the death valley per year; number of start-ups incorporating etc.	QL	Desk research	Core
		Types of existing policies and their appropriateness of to the maturity of the ecosystem	Qualitative information Gaps in support, needs for improvement; evaluation results	QL	Desk research and interview with regional authority; incubators, accelerators, industry associations; companies	Core



## ANNEX B – SUMMARY OF THE MINI POLICY HACK

The **Mini Policy Hack** organised under the EER project was one of the parallel sessions of the SME Assembly that took place in Helsinki (Finland) on 25-27 November 2019. The goal was to bring together enthusiastic regional and local public/private investors, venture capital and business angel networks, regional policymakers, business support organisations and entrepreneurs ready to participate in a lively and highly interactive policy session during the SME Assembly.

**The challenge to hack:** *What actions are needed to foster more interregional investments that help firms to scale up across Europe and how can they be addressed at regional/interregional levels? How can regional and local actors make the European Single Market happen for scale-ups?*

Access to finance is still one of the biggest barriers for firms to scale up. At the same time, cross-border financing of innovative ventures is becoming a more and more important driver of company growth. A strong, dense and supportive community of venture capital firms, business angels, dealmaker networks, seed investors, and other forms of financing such as crowdfunding is essential both for start-ups and scale-ups. Nevertheless, most investments are short term, do not provide a big enough ticket size and there is a significant lack of long-term investment particularly for scale-ups.

Firms that would like to scale up are usually confronted by an equity gap; seed financing is accessible at start-up stage but angel investors usually do not invest above a threshold while venture capital firms or banks do not invest below a certain limit. Second- and third-round financing can thus become challenging, especially when firms want to move from pilot to demonstration or when moving into a flagship/first-of-a-kind and industrial scale-up stage.

Start-ups and scale-ups typically acquire funding within their own country during the Seed and Series A stages. Later on, however, they look outside and during a Series B round international investor offer them more options. Not having access to the right ticket size of financing is also one of the reasons why many start-ups leave the region looking for capital and bigger markets elsewhere. In the growth phase, firms need access to large or international markets; openness is the key and this is the area where a well-functioning European Single Market could make a difference by nurturing more growth champions in Europe with a more strategic mindset.

Cross-border venture capital investments can be especially instrumental in supporting high-growth companies. Besides European actions, there is a lot that can be done (and is already happening) to build the European Single Market for start-ups and scale-ups from the ground up, through local and regional initiatives, investment networks and an alignment of funding activities.

### **Potential solutions:**

Four potential solutions were presented to the teams of hackers:

- 1) **Cooperation among investors:** Experienced VC firms creating subsidiaries in foreign countries. In the past, the rule of thumb was that investors did not want to be further than an hour's drive from their ventures, but this is changing as firms set up more funds abroad or look for specific growth markets with a vibrant start-up ecosystem.

*Note:* Syndication between VCs often takes place when smaller VC funds in less prosperous regions identify promising investments, which they cannot or do not wish to fund alone in later funding rounds. Syndication with larger VCs or those strategically positioned in the sector is a win-win and a good example of cross-border investment.

- 2) **Connecting scale-ups with corporates internationally:** Investments by larger corporations along or beyond their value chain. Larger corporations identify companies (directly or via their investment vehicles) outside their border that fit into their needs or portfolio, in which case they invest with a minority stake or proceed to a direct acquisition.
- 3) **Providing interregional support:** Policymakers who aim at creating a supportive ecosystem follow their entrepreneurs in their efforts to go beyond regional borders. Cooperation among regional public funds supporting mutual access to international markets or launching joint public procurement schemes helps to facilitate the European Single Market. Interregional innovation networks among incubators and technology centres can also support scale-ups with advice on investors and access to funding.
- 4) **Relocation of start-ups:** Start-ups themselves identify their weaknesses in terms of funding but also other services (legal, design, competitive production facilities, management, marketing, lobbying, etc.) and relocate part of their activities. The most frequent case here is relocation of marketing and possibly headquarters in larger hubs, while maintaining production (ICT development, biotech research, etc.) in their home countries, where the wage/productivity ratio is favourable.

Cross-border investments can be instrumental in supporting high-growth companies, however, it is not a straightforward decision. Policymakers can become concerned that cross-border investments predominantly benefit foreign economies and fail to develop the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. However, an in-depth analysis may prove that the cross-border activity is not a zero-sum game: if transborder funding created native-born multinationals and both countries benefit there is a win-win situation. In addition, for the EU as a whole, creating European hubs that can compete with existing and emerging US hubs, will improve the broader European ecosystem. But policy may not be in a position to impose conditions for such win-wins, hence the value of this policy hack.

### **Discussions:**

The participants discussed each solution in small groups, thinking about the current state of the art, why this solution has not been developed or which are the barriers and proposed ideas to enhance the collaboration in each area.

### **Group 1 – Cooperation among investors:**

Large differences exist in the quality and depth of support given to start-ups/scale-ups to prepare them for due diligence and other auditing tools currently used by investors. Such support not only prepares the entrepreneurs, it also helps 'manage expectations' and provides a 'reality check' earlier in the scale-up funnel.

Therefore, the proposed solution is to organise and coordinate a process of simultaneous training and preparation of scale-ups for due diligences and audit practices in different regions, which involves the following phases:

- Phase 1 – local (i.e. within a specific region): preparation/training of scale-ups for due diligence processes

- Phase 2 – local: collection of cases and associated evidence
- Phase 2 – EU-demo ‘pitching event’ for private investors only where the local cases and associated process is presented

The process should be tightly coordinated using coherent templates, standards, indicators and protocols across regions so that the evidence presented to investors helps them define best practices and, ultimately, supports their diffusion across regions.

### **Group 2 – Connecting scale-ups with corporates internationally:**

So far, there has been very little connection of scale-ups with corporates internationally due to a lack of awareness of potential multinational corporations among scale-ups, and vice versa; uneven negotiation power between scale-ups and corporations; absence of an open innovation culture among corporations; and lack of time and resources for collaboration among scale-ups and start-ups.

Corporations are increasingly interested in working with start-ups and scale-ups, which is a positive trend. Matching activities, voluntary declarations and other attempts are being made, but they have not successfully scaled up.

There are different options to promote and strengthen the cooperation of scale-ups with international corporations:

- The collaborative large-scale European Matchmaking initiative implemented across regions with the support from Commission
- Making use of professional resources to prepare and implement the events
- Connected to the events, showcasing successful collaboration cases between scale-ups and corporations
- When the volumes allow, encourage regions to collaborate in variable configurations focusing on specific thematic areas
- When enough scale-ups and corporations identify the need for specific facilities (e.g. rapid prototyping, initial small-scale manufacturing, etc.), support their construction
- This development could be launched making use of Commission funding e.g. in 3-4 year projects, with the requirement that implementing regions develop and secure sufficient revenue streams or other sources of funding for the activities to continue if they prove successful

### **Group 3 – Providing interregional support:**

There are several challenges that hamper the provision of interregional support to help start-ups scale their activities up: poor access to finance and capital, weak connections with stakeholders that have the right knowledge; and low levels of cooperation among regions due to unwillingness to use their funds in other regions.

In order to provide greater interregional support and tackle those issues, the hackers came up with the following solution: *Development of mission-oriented and connected regional ecosystems*. Features of the solution include:

- 1) Agree on common challenges (i.e. climate change)
- 2) Classify the regions according to their interpretation, how the challenge affects them or how they can work to face this challenge (i.e. Athens might create a group

with Barcelona and Rome, and Helsinki with Copenhagen and Stockholm due to their common features)

- 3) Organisation of interregional scale-up events, coordinated at EU level, where actors (i.e. entrepreneurs, academia, private capital, corporates, public money, etc.) from all over Europe can meet and work together around the regional interpretation of these challenges; the goal would be to create synergies and collaboration opportunities among stakeholders from different regions (activities could be supported by a fund of funds dedicated to each of the challenges)

#### **Group 4 – Relocation of start-ups:**

When start-ups grow, they have renewed requirements and may need to relocate part of their activities for access to networks, markets or funding. This partial relocation is done for the benefit of the business itself, as a single locality could hamper growth.

There are hubs, which attract those growth-oriented start-ups, partly because of their dense and recognised ecosystems (i.e. Silicon Valley, Boston, New York) but also partly because of active policies to attract dynamic start-ups. London, Berlin and Amsterdam are emerging hubs in Europe as well as Luxembourg, Lithuania and Malta in fintech and gaming respectively, because they allow companies to incorporate without a mandatory physical presence. The UK's Department of International Trade is a famous policy for helping overseas businesses set up in Britain.

The reasons this partial relocation is difficult and hence not widespread are both regulatory (regional support schemes do not allow companies to leave; new incorporations are needed in every European Member State; non-EU residents receive start-up visas for individual Member States and not the EU as a whole) and financial. While multinationals have the means to relocate, start-ups have not.

Policies supporting this type of scale-up through early stage efforts to become multinational can be:

- Abolish obligation to stay in the region, where initial grants were provided
- Engage in the completion of a Single Market for company location
- Create European visas/residence permits for attracting non-EU entrepreneurs, giving them the ability to invest in more than one European Member State
- Create a European Ltd Company status facilitating investments all over Europe
- Create interregional collaboration to facilitate the location of companies in more than one region

If European countries do not become more open to sharing there is a danger of losing dynamic start-ups to the US and even Asia.

Afterwards, a rapporteur per group presented the discussion and the solution that they came up with. There was a vote and participants chose Group 4, which worked on the relocation of start-ups, as the best solution. The team members earned the *Best Fresh Idea* title promoting cross-border investment for scale-ups.

The agenda of the day was as follows:

<b>TIME</b>	
13:30-14:00	Arrival and registration
14:00-14:15	Welcome, Katarzyna Balucka, European Commission DG GROW Presentation of the methodology, the challenge and proposed solutions Jari Romanainen, Technopolis Group
14:15-15:30	Work in teams (one team per potential solution), supported by the mentors
15:30-16:10	Discussion of the results
16:10-16:30	Conclusions, next steps

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