

Joint Policy Recommendations for fostering and facilitating regional transitions

Deliverable 2.3



Deliverable number 2.3 – Joint Policy Recommendations for fostering and facilitating regional transitions

Work package 2 – Regional transition accelerator

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Executive Summary

The **STARS EU Alliance Universities** reaffirm their collective ambition to act as *authentic engines for regional transformation*, building on each partner's territorial strengths and knowledge ecosystems. The Alliance aims to identify regional needs in skills and innovation capacity, translate them into applied research and educational responses, and connect these efforts across borders to advance the European Green and Digital transitions.

Two prerequisites underpin this ambition.

First, obtaining a clear and accurate insight into **regional and Smart Specialisation (S3/RIS3) policies** is essential. These frameworks not only define strategic directions but also reveal opportunities for synergy and complementarity across the STARS EU priority areas —Green Transition, Digital Transformation and Social Value and Wellbeing. Second, establishing **continuous, interactive relations** with regional authorities and policy-responsible organisations ensures that universities can both inform and adapt to evolving innovation agendas, acting as trusted partners in governance processes rather than isolated academic actors.

Building on these principles, **Work Package 2 – Regional Transition Accelerator (RTA)** launched one of the earliest joint activities within STARS EU: a detailed mapping of regional Smart Specialisation Strategies. The first milestone, *Deliverable 2.1 – Report on RIS3 Analysis Outcomes* (January 2024), established a shared understanding of regional innovation frameworks and cross-border complementarities.

This **Deliverable 2.3 – Joint Policy Recommendations** represents a follow-up phase. It compiles and updates the most relevant regional policy frameworks (2024–2025), integrating feedback from local and regional authorities across nine territories. The consultations focused on:

- Aligning university innovation and education activities with updated **RIS3 2028–2034** cycles.
- Identifying where **knowledge creation, applied research, and talent development** could bring the most added value.
- Developing **joint recommendations** for future strategic regional policy orientation and **interregional collaboration** within the Alliance.

The synthesis distils these inputs into a shared vision and **24-month action agenda** for the Alliance Steering Committee. It translates stakeholder expectations into practical measures that reinforce regional innovation capacity, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and sustainable skills development — in full alignment with the **New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA)**, the **European Green Deal**, and the **Regional Innovation Valleys (I3/RIV)** initiative.

Cross-cutting insights from the nine regions converge on several structural needs:

- The creation of **single, visible entry points** (“Regional Gateways”) at each university for external engagement on internships, theses, pilot projects, and R&I cooperation.
- The adoption of **faster, simpler collaboration pathways** with clear mandates, ensuring transparency and continuity.
- Regular, **quarterly results-oriented updates** that replace fragmented communication with consistent, measurable reporting.
- Recognition that **RIS3 thematic content remains stable**, while **governance and implementation processes** are the true drivers of transformation.
- Preparation for **funding shifts** across ERDF, national, and municipal streams, with coherent project pipelines ready for the 2028–2034 programming period.
- Systematic attention to **AI, digitalisation, and ethics**, ensuring innovation remains human-centred and inclusive.

The **Alliance-level roadmap** defines seven coordinated actions for the next 12 months — from establishing Regional Gateways and quarterly reporting to launching RIS3 Alignment Sprints, interregional living labs, and a unified KPI dashboard. These actions will ensure that every partner region benefits from visible progress and measurable impact.

The report also highlights **partner-specific first moves**, reflecting the diversity and strength of each regional ecosystem — from *energy security and AI in Kraków* to *healthy ageing in Opava*, *circular innovation in Bragança*, *hydrogen in Belfort*, and *tourism and health in Tenerife*. Together, they showcase the STARS EU Alliance as a transnational network of regional innovation accelerators.

In essence, this Deliverable positions **STARS EU as a European reference model** for university-led regional transition: one that connects policy and practice, aligns education and innovation, and advances shared resilience across nine regions — demonstrating how universities, as public anchors, can deliver tangible impact for Europe’s sustainable future.

1. Cross cutting needs and proposed actions

Cross cutting needs heard from authorities

Across all nine STARS EU regions, public authorities emphasised the importance of creating **visible, functional gateways** between universities and their external environments. They frequently cited the difficulty of identifying the right contact points within higher-education institutions for cooperation on internships, thesis supervision, pilot initiatives, or joint R&I projects. In response, stakeholders called for *single, clearly branded entry points*—either digital or physical—capable of channelling requests efficiently to relevant units. Establishing such gateways would not only simplify access for partners but also strengthen the perception of universities as open, responsive innovation actors.

A second, recurring concern was the **complexity and fragmentation of collaboration pathways**. Regional authorities and chambers of commerce advocated for streamlined decision procedures with clear mandates, ensuring that external engagement does not become dispersed across overlapping departments. Simplified cooperation frameworks and leaner administrative routines were viewed as essential to sustain continuity in projects and to translate research ideas into measurable regional outcomes.

Stakeholders also underlined the need for **predictable, results-oriented communication**. Instead of sporadic or generic newsletters, they preferred *regular quarterly updates* highlighting achievements, upcoming funding opportunities, and pilot outcomes. Such updates would serve both as transparency tools and as vehicles for building long-term trust with public and private actors.

While the thematic focus of **Smart Specialisation Strategies (RIS3)** remains relatively stable across the Alliance, authorities consistently stressed that *governance and process* are the real levers for progress. Universities are therefore encouraged to align their **Thematic Interest Groups (TIGs)** with the procedural priorities of regional innovation ecosystems—focusing on co-design, monitoring, and agile adaptation rather than revisiting established thematic content.

Another forward-looking expectation relates to **financial and policy transitions**. Regional governments anticipate evolving funding landscapes—spanning new national programmes, municipal budgets, and specialised instruments such as the EU RIV or I3 schemes. Authorities urged universities to demonstrate coherent project pipelines that can flexibly adapt to these changes while maintaining strategic continuity.

Finally, partners consistently identified **AI and digitalisation** as both an opportunity and a responsibility. Universities are expected not only to exploit digital tools for innovation and regional service delivery but also to uphold ethical standards, ensure data protection, and close emerging *skills gaps* in AI-related domains. Embedding these dimensions within education, research, and outreach activities will help ensure that technological progress translates into inclusive, sustainable regional impact.

Proposed Alliance level actions (coming 24 months)

To translate stakeholder feedback into a concrete, coordinated agenda, the STARS EU Alliance will embark on a twelve-month implementation cycle that operationalises the principles of openness, responsiveness, and impact across all partner universities. Each action line combines immediate deliverables with institutional learning processes, ensuring that regional transition efforts are both measurable and replicable across Europe.

1. Establishing Regional Gateways.

Every partner university will deploy a *Regional Gateway*—a single, visible entry point equipped with a dedicated inbox and light customer-relationship-management (CRM) system. This mechanism will route all external stakeholder requests—internships, thesis topics, R&I proposals, or pilot collaborations—within 72 hours. Clear internal mandates will be assigned, either through Regional Transition Accelerator (RTA) teams or communication units, ensuring that universities present a unified, accessible interface to their regions. These gateways will become the operational backbone of stakeholder engagement.

2. Institutionalising transparent regional communication.

A common *Quarterly Regional Update* (two-page format) will be adopted across the Alliance. (This Quarterly will be translated in own national language.) Each edition will summarise new partnerships, pilot results, open calls, and upcoming opportunities, serving both as an accountability mechanism and as a regional showcase. By sharing these updates with authorities, chambers of commerce, and civic actors, the Alliance will foster evidence-based policy dialogue and position its universities as reliable partners in regional innovation ecosystems.

3. Running RIS3 2028–2034 Alignment Sprints.

During Q1–Q2 of the next year, each region will organise an *Alignment Sprint* mapping its Thematic Interest Groups (TIGs) to regional domains and open calls under the upcoming RIS3 cycle (2028–2034). This will help identify synergies between academic expertise and policy priorities, supporting faster integration of Alliance-level competencies into regional strategies and ensuring coherence between STARS EU and the emerging *Regional Innovation Valleys (RIV)*.

4. Empowering interregional living labs.

Where momentum already exists—such as *the Living Lab Nexus* for future (led by IPB) the *Energy Transition Living Lab* (led by UMLP) and *STARS Health Living Lab* (Hanze)—the Alliance will deepen cross-border collaboration. These pilots will act as demonstrators of the Alliance's capacity to scale applied innovation through multistakeholder partnerships, integrating SMEs, public authorities, and students in hands-on experimentation aligned with Green Deal and NEIA priorities.

5. Publishing accessible funding maps.

Each partner will prepare and regularly update a *one-page funding map* covering ERDF, national, municipal, and special instruments (e.g. Nij Begun Fund in North Netherlands). These visual summaries will help internal teams and external partners navigate complex funding landscapes, identify co-funding opportunities, and reduce duplication across regional projects.

6. Tracking engagement KPIs and continuous learning.

To ensure accountability, the Alliance will introduce a common set of *engagement indicators*:

- average time-to-first-meeting,
- number of internships and theses placed with authorities and SMEs,
- number of co-funded doctoral projects,
- signed pilot MoUs, and
- percentage of requests processed via Gateways.

A simple dashboard will visualise progress, allowing each institution to benchmark its performance while learning from peers. Over time, these metrics will inform funding decisions and shape next-generation engagement models.

7. Expanding international collaboration through Action Cards.

A future-oriented “Action Card” methodology is being developed within WP2 RTA as a practical tool to translate regional priorities into coordinated actions across the Alliance. It will provide a shared format for partners to describe, align, and monitor their innovation initiatives through the Regional Gateways. Illustrative examples are provided in Annex 2, introducing the Action Card concept.

Proposed and existing partner specific first moves

Building on the shared cross-cutting needs and the agreed alliance-level roadmap, each STARS EU partner university has defined its **first set of concrete actions** for the next 6–12 months. These actions demonstrate the Alliance’s collective ability to translate stakeholder dialogue into measurable regional impact, aligned with RIS3 and the broader objectives of sustainable, inclusive, and innovation-driven transitions.

PK – Cracow University of Technology (Małopolska / Kraków, Poland)

The Małopolska region is entering a new phase of strategic renewal, where *energy security*, *artificial intelligence*, and *air quality* are central policy themes. PK will align its pilot projects with the ongoing regional strategy update and co-develop *living-labs use cases* with. These living labs will address practical sustainability challenges such as urban emissions and energy efficiency, ensuring that technological innovation contributes directly to climate resilience and better urban management.

Hanze University of Applied Sciences (Northern Netherlands)

Hanze will organise a *governance round-table* with the Assembly of the Northern Provinces (SNN) and the Association of Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences (UvhN) to refine coordination across RIS3 processes. The university will prepare structured inputs for the RIS3 2028–2034 update and continue aligning the *ERDF and Nij Begun* funding pipelines to ensure multi-level coherence between regional innovation agendas, public investments, and applied research. Hanze will also strengthen its role as lead of the *STARS Health Living Lab*, connecting cross-border innovation in health, digitalisation, and inclusion.

Université Marie et Louis Pasteur (UMLP) – Bourgogne Franche-Comté (France)

UMLP will establish a *central collaboration desk* to manage external partnerships and produce quarterly regional updates shared with authorities and chambers. In collaboration with the *Pôle Métropolitain Nord Franche-Comté (PMNFC)* and the city of Belfort, the university will launch applied R&I projects under the *Energy Transition Living Lab*. Additional partnerships are emerging with the *Territorial Innovation Lab of Besançon on water resource management*—an example of place-based innovation responding to local sustainability challenges. UMLP also plans to promote the *STARS EU Traineeship Programme* actively, leveraging the *End-of-Life platform* to bridge academia, industry, and public services in circular economy transitions.

Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB, Portugal)

IPB will expand its network of *open living labs and incubation spaces* across Trás-os-Montes and Alto Tâmega, fostering collaboration with SMEs and municipalities. The institute will convene dedicated *RIS3 working groups* with regional councils and the *CCDR-Norte* coordination body, ensuring that regional policy priorities are embedded in academic programming and applied research. The focus will be on strengthening internships, co-supervised theses, and joint R&I initiatives that combine green, digital, and health-oriented innovation within rural communities.

University West (Västra Götaland / Fyrbodol, Sweden)

University West will continue to advance its flagship model of *Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)* and *Work-Integrated Education (WIE)* in close cooperation with employers and local authorities. The university will formalise *structured stakeholder forums* and clear contact points to enhance the visibility and accessibility of its engagement activities. Building on its strong industrial partnerships, University West will further develop the *Trollhättan Sustainable Energy Hub* and the *Knowledge Alliance on Segregation*, both designed to promote inclusion, social cohesion, and resilience within the green industrial transition.

HSB Bremen (Germany)

HSB will deepen the integration of academic research into professional training by expanding *dual study programmes* and introducing *challenge-based learning formats* that connect students directly with city projects and enterprises. These initiatives will make the university a visible driver of innovation and talent retention in Bremen. In addition, HSB plans to develop

an *impact visibility campaign* across the city, showcasing the tangible social and economic value generated by university-led innovation and regional partnerships in the *Metropolitan Region Northwest*.

Silesian University in Opava (SUO, Czech Republic)

SUO will continue to reinforce its regional innovation presence through *quarterly “MS Updates”*, published in coordination with the *Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC)* and the *Chamber of Commerce (OHK Opava)*. The university will embed MSIC experts in key research and innovation teams and co-lead the *Living Lab Opava and the Living Lab Karviná*, focusing on healthy ageing, digitalisation, and SME entrepreneurship. These efforts aim to sustain the region’s active role in the *RIS3 2028–2034 working groups* and consolidate SU’s position as a bridge between academia and business.

University “Aleksandër Moisiu” Durrës (UAMD, Albania)

UAMD is leading preparatory work for the first *Regional Smart Specialisation Strategy (RIS3)* in Albania, anticipated after the ongoing territorial reform (2027). The university will convene a *Regional Stakeholder Network* uniting public authorities, chambers, and civil society actors, while establishing a *Single Entry Point* and *Quarterly Regional Updates* to institutionalise transparency. These measures will position UAMD as a key facilitator of innovation policy dialogue and as an anchor for EU integration processes in the Durrës region.

University of La Laguna (ULL, Spain)

ULL will engage the *Government of the Canary Islands* and the *Canary Islands Agency for Research, Innovation, and Information Society (ACIISI)* to strengthen the implementation of the regional RIS3 priorities—particularly in *health, digital transformation, and sustainable tourism*. The university will also host *stakeholder discussion groups* focused on local implementation pathways for these policies, promoting co-creation between academia, public institutions, and the private sector. These initiatives will reinforce ULL’s leadership in the STARS EU Thematic Interest Groups on *Healthy Ageing, Circular Economy, and Energy Transition*, ensuring that island innovation contributes actively to Europe’s broader sustainability vision.

Together, these targeted actions form a coherent and dynamic mosaic of regional innovation activity. They connect local strengths to shared Alliance objectives—embedding education, research, and engagement within the evolving European innovation framework. The diversity of regional contexts becomes a strategic advantage for STARS EU, demonstrating how universities, when acting as regional transition accelerators, can collectively shape a sustainable and competitive Europe.

2. Regional policies and main developments in STARS EU regions in relation to the STARS EU priority areas

a. Hochschule Bremen – City University of Applied Sciences, Bremen

The most relevant regional strategic documents for the Hochschule Bremen – City University of Applied Sciences (in the following referred to as HSB) are Bremen's Innovation Strategy 2030 (Bremen's contribution to the RIS3), Bremen's Science Plan (shaping the funding environment and the HSB's capacity to act) and the Framework for Action 2022-2025 of the Metropolitan Region Northwest.

The current Innovation Strategy 2030 already covers the first few years of the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union (2028-2034). The creation of the next Innovation Strategy will be tackled upon commencement of the next multiannual financial framework. The HSB contributes its strategic development plan 2030 and its transfer strategy 2030 towards this process. As increased investments in defence and dual use solutions are being discussed across Germany, this topic could be more prominent in future strategies.

The central recommendations expressed to the HSB by the public authorities include crossing the gap between academia and regional companies even more effectively with two effects: 1) offering relevant and real-world use cases for students and 2) tightening the link between students and potential employers struggling with a shortage of skilled workers. Through its strategic internationalisation and expansion of English-language offer, the HSB may also help attract international talents towards this end. Corresponding to regional developments, the HSB is recommended to contribute to stronger technology transfer in fields such as digitalisation, climate protection, mobility transition and sustainable production. There is a significant overlap in the abovementioned recommendations and activities pursued in the context of STARS EU – both in terms of the formats envisioned, as well as the research topics proposed.

b. Hanze, Groningen, Northern Netherlands

The most relevant policies for regional development and innovation regarding STARS EU priority areas are ERDF and the new Policy/Fund Nij Begun.

The expectation is that the content of the Northern Netherlands (NNL) RIS3 will not change dramatically, so the focus on the transitions in digital, health, circular economy and energy will remain, meaning that the STARS EU strategy on these areas can be continued and further developed.

Contribution to the improvement of the governance on NNL level is an important issue, especially now the new policy Nij Begun started. A coherent strategy based on RIS3 should be the core of the programming of ERDF and Nij Begun. Hanze/STARS EU and other regional partners should align the activities/projects based on this strategy, in a better way to achieve more impact in the region.

The creation process for the RIS3 2028 – 2034 hasn't started yet but is expected to begin in the autumn. The Hanze is involved in one of the first activities and should try to make a coordinated effort to contribute to the new RIS3 strategy.

Financial shifts in Europe will most likely put pressure on available funds for innovation/research, this can influence the capacity and impact of Hanze/STARS EU and can lead to more direct assignments. In the case of the NNL, the Nij Begun fund can generate some new perspectives.

c. UAMD, Albania/Durres

The most relevant challenges derive from the uncertainty of the future status of Regions and Municipalities in Albania. Expectedly, prior to the 2027 local elections, a deep Territorial Reform will take place. According to that, Albania might have only 5-6 Regions and instead of 61 municipalities, to a substantially lower number.

That would open the possibility to have RIS3 in Regional level, instead of the actual S3 nationally. This would give UAMD and STARS EU Alliance a good chance to share its knowledge and contribute in the most relevant policies for regional development and innovation, in helping the drafting and crafting of a RIS3 for Durres Region.

The expectation is that the content of the Durres Region Development Strategy, to RIS3 will not change dramatically, so the focus on Tourism, Trade, and Transport, will remain the main pillars, followed by maritime, digital, health, agriculture and circular economy, this meaning that the STARS EU strategy on these areas can be continued and further developed.

Contribution to the creation of a functional network, as a basis for better involvement and improvement of stakeholder contributions in the governance on regional level is an important issue, especially in the framework of quintuple helix. STARS EU Alliance and its regional public authority partners, would serve as “best practices” for Durres Region, and this might open opportunities for common projects based on future RIS3, to achieve more impact in the region.

d. Polytechnic University Braganca, Portugal/Norte

The most relevant regional policies for development and innovation aligned with STARS EU priorities include the NORTE 2030 Regional Operational Programme, PRR (Recovery and Resilience Plan), and initiatives under the SmartRegion and Green & Digital Transition strategies supported by CCDR-N and local intermunicipal communities (CIMs).

For both Terras de Trás-os-Montes (TTM) and Alto Tâmega e Barroso (ATB), the current focus areas — green transition, digital transformation, and social value & well-being — are already embedded in strategic plans and EU-funded projects. This includes climate resilience (e.g., CLIMAAX_AT), circular and sustainable agriculture, digital public services, and innovation ecosystems with social impact. As such, STARS EU strategy can be built upon these developments with strong continuity.

Improving governance and coordination is key. With multiple policy layers (NORTE2030, PRR, local strategies), there is a clear opportunity to align RIS3 programming with STARS EU ambitions. Better coordination among regional actors — including Polytechnic Institute of Bragança, municipalities, and clusters — would enhance impact and innovation spillover, especially in rural and low-density areas.

The RIS3 2028–2034 co-creation process is expected to begin in late 2025. Both CIMs and academic actors should actively engage from the start, ensuring that rural innovation, green industries, and digital inclusion are core elements. A targeted approach to integrate STARS EU themes can position the regions more strongly in the European innovation landscape.

Potential funding limitations in the next cycle may challenge local innovation capacity, but Portugal's continued focus on territorial cohesion and resilience offers an opportunity. STARS EU could play a catalytic role in connecting regional assets with European-level missions, particularly in smart rural transformation.

e. University West, Sweden/Västra Götaland

The most relevant strategies for regional development are *The Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland 2021–2030 (RUS)* and the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, *Strengthening Innovation Capacity 2022–2025 (S3)*. These strategies are closely aligned with the STARS EU priority areas, including digital transformation, green transition, healthy ageing, and inclusive development.

The Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland is being revised the preparation of responses to the draft is ongoing, and the updated strategy is expected to be decided in early 2026.

The revised strategy places greater emphasis on international competitiveness, skills development linked to the green and digital transition, and the role of civil society and the social economy in regional development. A major change in the revised strategy concerns the cross-sectoral focus areas. Three new focus areas have been highlighted: *Green Industrial Transition, Preparing Children and Young People for the Future, and Increased Resilience through Collaboration in Spatial Planning*.

The revised Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland focuses on emerging societal challenges that underscore the need for enhanced regional preparedness and resilience. Geopolitical instability, declining trust in institutions and mental health issues among young people are identified as threats to long-term development capacity. In

response, a new cross-sectoral focus area, *Increased resilience through collaboration in spatial planning*, has been introduced, aiming to strengthen crisis preparedness and coordination.

Regarding the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, there are proposals for slightly revised wording for clarification, but no direct revision.

Digitalisation and the development of AI present major opportunities, but also ethical and social challenges. Issues related to privacy, accessibility, and skills provision need to be addressed proactively to prevent technological advancement from creating new divides.

f. Cracow University of Technology, Poland

The Małopolska region, with Kraków as its scientific and economic hub, is currently updating its *Regional Development Strategy 2030* and Smart Specialisation framework. This process—scheduled for completion by the end of 2026—prioritises *energy security, artificial intelligence (AI), and climate resilience* as critical axes of transformation. The city's *Kraków 2030 Vision* extends to 2050 and integrates decarbonisation, smart mobility, and digital transition as key pillars of sustainable urban growth.

Cracow University of Technology (PK) plays a central role in supporting these strategic transitions. It leads several applied R&I initiatives focusing on renewable energy, AI in industrial processes, and urban air-quality monitoring. PK's ongoing work within STARS EU strengthens regional cooperation between academia, local authorities, and industry, particularly through *living-lab pilots* that co-design solutions for environmental challenges.

By embedding applied research into municipal projects and engaging with the regional authorities, PK helps bridge scientific excellence with territorial needs. Its contribution to the *Energy Transition* and *Digital Transformation* Thematic Interest Groups (TIGs) of STARS EU ensures that local innovation aligns with the EU's twin transitions under the Green Deal and the Digital Europe Programme.

g. University of La Laguna, Tenerife/Canarias

In Canary Islands, as an ultraperipheral region, we are at the receiving end of ERDF funds, which makes it even more necessary to align our R&D priorities with those of the EU. The institutional instrument to do it is the so-called enlarged RIS3 strategy, established in March 2023. The strategy included five lines, 2 of them (*Health and Wellbeing* and Smart and sustainable tourism) are also among the lines included in STARS EU's research priorities and TIGs.

As the main instrument to implement this strategy, the Canary Islands government opened on April 2025, a forum for the universities in the region (including of course ULL) to contribute

to the draft of the Canarian Law of Science, and we are discussing with the corresponding government branch the appropriate tools to implement the RIS3.

At a more local level, ULL participates in different government bodies related to R&D in Tenerife, created by the Tenerife Island Council. Most notably, the Technologic and Scientific Park (PCTT), and the Foundation for the Advance of Biomedical Research (BioAdvance), which puts us in a very good position to influence the local politics.

h. Silesian University in Opava, Czechia

The Moravian-Silesian Region is one of the Czech Republic's most active territories in industrial and economic transformation. Its Regional Innovation Strategy (RIS3) identifies Healthy Ageing, Digitalisation, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, and Future Skills as key domains for the 2028–2034 period. The region continues to shift from its traditional heavy industry roots toward a diversified, knowledge-based economy, supported by emerging innovation ecosystems centred primarily around Ostrava and Opava.

Silesian University in Opava (SUO) plays a significant role in this transformation by acting as a regional driver of innovation, education, and social engagement. Through initiatives such as the Living Labs, Business Gate in Karviná, and the Unisféra centre in Opava, the university connects academia, businesses, and public institutions to co-create solutions in areas like healthy ageing, digital inclusion, and entrepreneurship. SUO also contributes to regional upskilling through interdisciplinary study programmes in social sciences, physics, informatics, and business - Innovative and Sustainable Entrepreneurship, which help strengthen the innovation capacity of local SMEs and start-ups.

SUO's participation in the STARS EU Alliance further amplifies its regional and European impact by linking its expertise with transnational initiatives under the Healthy Ageing, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and Digital Transformation Thematic Innovation Groups (TIGs). Its activities promote lifelong learning, stakeholder co-creation, and inclusive approaches to regional innovation.

i. University Marie and Louis Pasteur, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France

UMLP has not been informed yet about the process for revising the S3 in Bourgogne-Franche-Comté. Besides the regional priorities that are expected to be reconducted (energy transition, sustainable industry, AI and digital transformation, individualized medicine...) local public authorities emphasize additional priorities which will be out of immediate scope of the S3, but within the STARS EU priority areas. Bourgogne Franche-Comté, is characterized by a few "metropolitan" areas, highly urbanized and clearly oriented towards collaboration with HEI's whereas for the more rural public authorities the perception of the opportunities is still more fragmented. Those who could be explored for intensifying collaboration supported by STARS EU could include the field of Healthy ageing and Inclusion & Social Justice. In the

scope of UMLP, the agglomerations of Belfort, Montbéliard and Besançon have significant policies in this respect: Belfort and Montbéliard involve UMLP and other public and private stakeholders in their projects (renovation of the campus, applied research in the hydrogen energy sector, and initiatives aiming to foster innovational mindsets and facilitate collaborations) funded through the national programme “Territories for Innovation”. Furthermore, UMLP is currently setting up its STARS EU Living lab on the energy transition with active input from Belfort and Montbéliard, and organizing the Future lab camp 2025-2026 within this framework. Public authorities and other stakeholders from de STARS EU regions will be invited to join.

The Besançon urban area (Grand Besançon Métropole, GBM), has recently adopted a local policy document (strategy) regarding Higher Education, Research and Innovation, and Student life, supporting initiatives and projects in the STARS EU priority areas. Indeed, these priorities correspond very well to the local needs. GBM is currently setting up a Lab of territorial innovation, targeting in particular the following territorial challenges: attractiveness, environmental, economic and social transitions, collective well-being, and social-territorial cohesion. The aim is to actively involve UMLP in this Lab, mainly in the fields of Humanities, Environmental sciences and Health/Healthcare. Opportunities for interregional collaboration will be actively sought for through STARS EU.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the Region financially supports Higher Education and Research in the perspective of attracting international talents as well as research activities with a strong focus on those encompassing an international scope and contributing to S3 priorities. The Region has also set up an informal network of public and private actors involved in European projects and policies, offering a promising platform for dissemination of the Alliance’s initiatives. A more formal dialogue aiming to support the university’s success rate in European calls is led by the Rectorate (a deconcentrated National authority representing the Ministry of Higher Education and Research).

3. Involvement of Regional authorities in STARS EU regions

In this chapter the involved regional authorities in the STARS EU regions are listed per region/university. Their relevance is showed by the connection to the main regional policies which relate to STARS EU priority areas.

Hochschule Bremen – City University of Applied Sciences, Bremen

Organisations

Senator for the Economy, Ports and Transformation
Senator for the Environment, Climate and Science
Metropolitan Region Northwest
Centre against Discrimination and Violence

Policies

RIS3/Own Policy
Own Policy
Own Policy
None

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

Both the Senator for the Economy, Ports and Transformation, as well as the Metropolitan Region Northwest are associated partners of STARS EU and engaged in frequent exchanges.

The **Senator for the Economy, Ports and Transformation** functions as a full ministry of the Bremen state, governing Bremen's economic policies. Its Innovation Strategy 2030 forms Bremen's contribution to the RIS3 on a European Level.

The **Metropolitan Region Northwest** includes 11 counties, five urban municipalities, also surrounding Bremen. The association is responsible for supporting and funding regional collaborative projects aimed at enhancing the region's visibility, competitiveness, future viability, and overall quality of life. The Metropolitan Advisory Board is the scientific advisory board of the Northwest Metropolitan Region – the HSB's rector currently presides as spokesperson.

The **Senator for the Environment, Climate and Science** is the state's ministry governing universities and research institutions. As a public university and according to the German federal system, the HSB is mainly and primarily funded through this Bremen's ministry, although the portions financed by third-party funds are increasingly significant. This senator guides Bremen's science policy via the "Science Plan", each spanning a strategic period of five years.

The **Centre against Discrimination and Violence** was consulted towards the creation of STARS EU's GEDI plan.

Hanze, Groningen, Northern Netherlands

Organisations

Province of Groningen
Assembly of the Northern Netherlands Provinces (SNN)
Municipality of Groningen (also part of SNN)
NOM (Northern Development Agency)
Municipality of Westerkwartier
Economic Board Northern Netherlands (EBNN) (Network)

Policies

ERDF/JTF/Nij Begun/own
ERDF/JTF
own policy
own policy
own policy
non

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

From the above listed authorities, **the Province of Groningen, the Municipality of Groningen and the NOM** are associated partners of STARS EU.

The **Assembly of the Northern Netherlands Provinces (SNN)** is the Management Authority for the ERDF and JTF fund. SNN is an organisation, founded by the three northern provinces (and four cities): Groningen, Drenthe and Fryslan. Together these provinces are responsible for the content of the policies and the RIS3 policy. ERDF and JTF cover the three key priority areas of STARS EU.

The Province of Groningen is an important authority for the Hanze (the Hanze is based in this province). The province has his own policies, which enables many (innovative) developments and the province rules the new important policy Nij Begun. Both policies cover the STARS EU key priority areas, in Nij Begun there is a strong emphasis on social value and well-being.

The Municipality of Groningen is also a very important authority/partner for the Hanze, Hanze's main facilities are based in this municipality. Like the province, also the municipality has strong own policies, enabling also the STARS EU key priority areas. Together with other organisations, Hanze is involved in the Agreement of Groningen.

UAMD, Albania/Durrës

Organisations

Municipality of Durrës
Municipal Council of Durrës
Prefecture of Durrës County
Durrës County Council

Policies

ERDF/JTF/own policy
own policy
own policy
own policy

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

Municipality of Durrës is the main body of local self-government, responsible for delivering public services in the city and surrounding areas. It is made up by the administrative units of Durrës, Sukth, Ishëm, Katundi i Ri, Rrashbull, and Manëz.

UAMD Campus and Corpus are located in the Municipality of Durrës. It is an associated partner with UAMD and STARS EU and has a very important role in enabling the Alliance priority areas policies implementation in the region.

Municipal Council of Durrës is the local legislative body that approves the city's budget, regulations, and development policies. There have been continuously many of UAMD academic staff in its membership composition.

Prefecture of Durrës County represents the central government at the regional level and coordinates state institutions' activities. It is an associated partner and is closely related to UAMD and STARS EU Alliance. It has an important role to play in a larger spectrum of regional policy articulation, accelerating the Alliance priorities implementation in the broader spatial planning.

Durrës County Council is the regional administrative unit coordinating policies and services across the county, including the city and surrounding municipalities. It has its own policies' and is in an indirect relation with UAMD, because its actual composition formulae. UAMD has a very good relationship with the County of Durrës.

UAMD is a public HEI, and by law, representatives of Albanian government form the majority of the Board of Administration. Members of this Board are selected from local public authorities. From its first composition in 2008, this highest-level decision-making forum hosted personalities as the Head of Municipality of Durres and the Head of Durres County.

Polytechnic University Braganca, Portugal/Norte

Organisations

Policies

Comunidade Intermunicipal das Terras de Trás-os-Montes	ERDF (intermediate) / own policy
Comunidade Intermunicipal do Alto Tâmega e Barroso	ERDF (intermediate) / own policy
Câmara Municipal de Bragança	own policy
Câmara Municipal de Macedo de Cavaleiros	own policy
Câmara Municipal de Miranda do Douro	own policy
Câmara Municipal de Alfândega da Fé	own policy
Câmara Municipal de Chaves	own policy

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

CIM Terras de Trás-os-Montes (Intermunicipal Community) is a public legal entity composed of nine municipalities. Main attributions include promoting the planning and management of the economic, social, and environmental development strategy of the territory. It is responsible for coordinating intermunicipal investments of intermunicipal interest and participating in the management of regional development support programs. Furthermore, it coordinates, at a supra-municipal level, actions between municipalities and Central Administration services in various areas, such as Economic and Social Affairs, Education, Mobility and Transport, and Civil Protection. The main functions are: Promote sustainable regional development based on local resources and cultural identity; Enhance regional competitiveness, innovation, and entrepreneurship; Modernize local administration and increase proximity to citizens; and Support education and combat school failure. In this way, The CIM TTM promotes sustainable rural development, enhances competitiveness through innovation, and fosters entrepreneurship — all of which directly align with STARS EU objectives. CIM TTM also engages in EU-funded programmes and is a key stakeholder for mobilising and scaling STARS EU pilots and policy labs in the region.

CIM Alto Tâmega e Barroso (Intermunicipal Community) is a public legal entity composed of six municipalities. CIMAT's mission is to define, promote, plan, and implement economic, social, and environmental development strategies in its territory. It must leverage European Union support funds and coordinate intermunicipal investments of municipal interest. Its attributions include promoting the planning and management of the economic, social, and environmental development strategy, coordinating intermunicipal investments, participating in the management of regional development support programs, and planning actions by supramunicipal public entities. CIMAT also ensures coordination between municipalities and the central administration in areas such as public water supply networks, basic sanitation infrastructure, wastewater and urban waste treatment, health equipment networks, educational and vocational training networks, spatial planning, nature conservation and natural resources, security and civil protection, mobility and transport, public equipment networks, promotion of economic, social, and cultural development, and cultural, sports, and leisure equipment networks. It can also exercise attributions transferred from the state administration, delegate competencies, and appoint representatives of local authorities in public and business entities. To fulfill its attributions, it can create its own technical and administrative services, associate with other public, private, or social and cooperative entities, create or participate in other legal entities, or establish local companies. The main functions are: Coordinate and implement regional strategies for economic, social, and environmental development; Align municipal investments of intermunicipal interest; Participate in the management of regional development support programmes (e.g., ERDF-funded initiatives); and Plan and coordinate services of a supra-municipal nature (such as transport, environment, and education). In this way, its mission and competences are closely tied to STARS EU priority areas, particularly in green infrastructure, public service innovation, and inclusive regional governance. CIMAT's capacity to represent municipalities and

establish partnerships also makes it a valuable intermediary for STARS EU implementation and replication activities.

Municipal Councils (Câmara Municipal de Bragança, Câmara Municipal de Macedo de Cavaleiros, Câmara Municipal de Miranda do Douro, Câmara Municipal de Alfândega da Fé, and Câmara Municipal de Chaves).

In Portugal, municipal councils are the executive bodies of each municipality. Their responsibilities are broadly defined by law but are also tailored to each municipality's specific needs. The general functions (applies to all listed municipalities) are: Local governance (manage education -pre-school and primary-, basic healthcare, local roads, water supply, waste collection, public lighting, parks, sports and cultural facilities.); Urban and territorial planning (manage zoning, building permits, infrastructure development); Environmental management (protect natural resources, promote sustainability, manage green spaces; Social services: support vulnerable populations, promote social inclusion, manage local housing and civil protection); Economic development (promote tourism, local products, entrepreneurship, and support local businesses); and Municipal finances (create and execute municipal budgets, manage public procurement, and maintain municipal assets.).

Their executive powers in areas like education, healthcare, mobility, territorial planning, and economic development directly contribute to STARS EU goals in smart, sustainable, and inclusive regional transformation. These municipalities are not only beneficiaries but also active co-creators in STARS EU's mission to strengthen resilience and prosperity in rural and peripheral areas.

University West, Sweden/Västra Götaland

Organisations

Policies

Region Västra Götaland

RUS/S3

Fyrbodal Municipal Association (also a part of Region Västra Götaland)

Own policy

City of Trollhättan (also a part of Fyrbodal Municipal Association)

Own policy

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

Region Västra Götaland is an associated partner of STARS EU. Region Västra Götaland is one of Sweden's largest regional authorities. It is responsible for key public services such as healthcare, public transport, regional development, and cultural affairs. The region plays a central role in coordinating sustainable growth, innovation, and collaboration between municipalities, academia, industry, and civil society. With a strong focus on green transition, digitalisation, and social inclusion, Region Västra Götaland is a key actor in implementing both national and EU strategies at the regional level.

Fyrbodal Municipal Association is a regional collaboration body comprising 14 municipalities in the northern part of Västra Götaland. While not formally an associated partner of STARS EU, it plays a key role in regional development and is part of Region Västra Götaland, particularly in areas such as sustainable growth, innovation, education, and infrastructure.

The City of Trollhättan is a key municipal actor in the Västra Götaland region and a long-standing partner of University West. While not formally listed as an associated partner of STARS EU, the city plays an active role in regional development, particularly in areas such as sustainable urban transformation, social inclusion, and skills provision.

Cracow University of Technology, Poland

Organisations

Regional Management Board of Małopolska

Marshal's Office of Małopolska Region

City of Kraków (Municipal Government)

Policies

Own Policy/RIS3

Own Policy/RIS3

Own Policy

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

Regional Management Board of Małopolska - Oversees the regional innovation and sustainability agenda; main policy partner for PK in energy security, AI, and green mobility.

Marshal's Office of Małopolska Region - Coordinates RIS3 revision, incorporating university-led inputs in the fields of digitalisation, industry innovation, and sustainable cities.

Małopolska is the only Polish region involved in the activities of the Awangarda Initiative (IA), as well as the first member region from Central Europe. The initiative initially existed as an informal agreement of selected regions from the European Union, and Małopolska was one of its 10 founding regions. Regional Management Board of Małopolska is an associated partner of STARS EU and supports in previous and future activities.

City of Kraków (Municipal Government) - Strategic cooperation in developing and testing urban living-lab solutions for clean energy, smart transport, and air quality.

University of La Laguna, Tenerife/Canarias

Organisations

Gobierno de Canarias

Cabildo de Tenerife

Agencia Canaria de Investigación,

Innovación y Sociedad de la Información (ACIISI)

Servicio Canario de Salud (SCS)

Chambers of Commerce

Policies

RIS3

Own Policy

RIS3

RIS3

Own politics

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

As mentioned above, the implementation of the regional R&D policies, and specifically the RIS3, is responsibility of the Canary Island Government through the Agencia Canaria de Investigación, Innovación y Sociedad de la Información (ACIISI), which is an associated member of STARS EU. Apart from it, the regional health system (SCS) is the other important stakeholder, in everything related to health and social well-being. In fact, one of the ongoing EU funded projects granted to STARS EU alliance in the TIG of healthy aging is completely aligned to the priorities of the SCS, which collaborates with us in the project, as the percentage of aging population in Canary Islands is increasing and expected to increase even more during the next years.

Locally, both the Cabildo insular and the Chamber of Commerce have also their own research policies. Specially in the case of the Cabildo, they have an important budget to foster innovation in Tenerife. As a result of the collaboration with ULL, this year a very important call has been created, to fund students who do their Ph.D. thesis hired by private companies with R&D areas, provided they do the Ph.D. at ULL and it deals with some problem of interest for the island and the company. 10 of these Ph.D. theses are expected to be completed in the next 4 years.

The Cabildo is also investing, through a newly created Plan de Innovación, in a newly shaped strategy to foster innovation in the aero spatial sector, especially in the field of manufacturing micro satellites that once launched and in orbit, may provide insight into different aspects such as territory, fire control and see surveillance. ULL, through their schools of engineering and the department of Astrophysics, in collaboration with the Canary Institute of Astrophysics (also an associated partner of STARS EU) are key actors in this strategy, which is also of potential interest for other partners of the alliance.

Organisations

Policies

City of Karvina

Municipality of Opava

Own Policy

Moravian-Silesian Region

Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC)

RIS3

Moravian Silesian Innovation and Development

Chamber of Commerce of Opava (OHK Opava)

Own Policy

Regional Authority of the Moravian-Silesian Region

Own Policy

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

City of Karviná – Acts as a key regional partner of SUO. Together, they operate the Business Gate entrepreneurship support centre and cooperate on strategic innovation and development projects.

Municipality of Opava - Supports SUO's engagement in community-based innovation, digital literacy, and social inclusion programmes.

Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC) - Acts as the main intermediary between business and academia; co-leads regional working groups for RIS3 2028–2034; embedded in SU's Living Lab governance.

Chamber of Commerce (OHK Opava) - Partner in the Living Lab Opava; facilitates SME participation in innovation pilots.

Regional Authority of Moravian-Silesian Region - Oversees policy integration between education, digitalisation, and sustainability; key stakeholder in STARS EU collaboration.

University Marie and Louis Pasteur, Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France

Organisations

Région académique Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

Conseil régional Bourgogne-Franche-Comté

Pôle métropolitain Nord-Franche-Comté

Grand Belfort

Pays de Montbéliard Agglomération

Grand Besançon Métropole

Grand Dole

Communauté de communes du Val de Morteau

Communauté d'agglomération de Vesoul

Pôle métropolitain Centre Franche-Comté

Communauté de communes Grand Pontarlier

Policies

State representative in the region, national policies
RIS, regional policy on higher education, research and innovation

Consultative and coordinating non formal body, acting on behalf of Grand Belfort and Pays de Montbéliard agglomération (no own policy)

Laureate actor of national programme for territorial innovation

Laureate actor of national programme for territorial innovation

Local policy on Higher education, Research and Student life

No formal policy but competent for economic development and other STARS EU priority area related activities

No formal policy but competent for economic development and other STARS EU priority area related activities

No formal policy but competent for economic development and other STARS EU priority area related activities

Consultative and coordinating non formal body, acting on behalf of the agglomerations of Besançon, Dole, Morteau, Pontarlier, Lons-le-Saunier and Vesoul (no own policy)

No formal policy but competent for economic development and other STARS EU priority area related activities

Relation with policies and STARS EU priority areas

Grand Belfort and **Pays de Montbéliard Agglomération** are formal partners of UMLP in the Future lab camp and Living lab in Energy transition.

Grand Besançon Métropole is committed to joint applied research with UMLP on territorial water management and expresses strong interest in collaboration with STARS EU. GBM is open for exploring any field whilst expressing particular interest for collaboration in the fields of green transition and inclusion and social justice, as well as environmental health.

The **regional council Bourgogne-Franche-Comté**, through its network of regional actors involved in European cooperation, invites UMLP to lead the next meeting (May 2026), aiming at kindling STARS EU wide collaborations in three sub-groups: Research & Innovation, Territorial transitions and Culture & Citizenship.

The **Région académique Bourgogne-Franche-Comté** actively supports European research applications and will be a valuable advisor for STARS EU related research projects in any of the priority areas.

Annexes:

1 Regional reports of the STARS EU partners

- A) Hochschule Bremen – City University of Applied Sciences, Bremen
- B) Hanze, Groningen, Northern Netherlands
- C) UAMD, Albania/Durres
- D) Polytechnic University Braganca, Portugal/Norte
- E) University West, Sweden/Västra Götaland
- F) Cracow University of Technology, Poland
- G) University of La Laguna, Tenerife/Canarias
- H) Silesian University in Opava, Czechia
- I) University Marie and Louis Pasteur, Bourgogne Franche-Comte, France

2. Methodology and examples of Action Card

A) Hochschule Bremen – City University of Applied Sciences, Bremen

Bremen is in Northwestern Germany. As a “two-city state”, the municipal governance bodies responsible for creating policies for Bremen and Bremerhaven (a port city close to Bremen) also function as full ministries.

The regions’ strengths lie particularly in aerospace, additive manufacturing, maritime, ports and logistics, green hydrogen technologies and wind energy. In terms of Bremen's labour market structure, strengths also include the comparatively high proportion of R&D-based jobs, academics, specialists, experts and highly-qualified people, the presence of various academic institutions in a limited space, the excellent research landscape, the good connections between research and industry, and well-developed logistics.

Nevertheless, Bremen’s development trajectory will also depend on the successful management of the following challenges in the coming years:

- The shortage of skilled workers for the future
- The comparatively small number of patent applications that focus on a few players
- The relatively low intensity of business start-ups compared to the other German Länder
- The decline of Bremen's traditional large-scale industry
- A relatively high share of long-term unemployment as compared with other German Länder

To compile this regional report, a mixture of in-person conversations with representatives from the three regional authorities and desk research of existing strategic documents was applied. The regional authorities most relevant to the evaluation of HSB’s role in the region were identified as:

- Senator for Economic Affairs, Ports and Transformation Bremen (equivalent to a Ministry)
- Senator for Environment, Climate, and Science Bremen (equivalent to a Ministry)
- Metropolitan Region Northwest (Association)

1. **Suggestions for the better alignment of the university take with regional needs and objectives**

1.1. **Cross the gap between academia and practice in teaching**

The systematic expansion of dual and practice-integrated study programmes in key industries that are particularly relevant to the region should be further promoted by the university.

Additionally, other ways to integrate practice partners (and thereby potential employers) into the curricula should be intensified. Formats such as challenge-based learning allow students to explore real-world issues, while at the same time providing a platform for employers to meet potential future employees and vice versa. This also addresses a key challenge: skilled worker retention in the state. Early contact with potential employers might offer an additional reason to pursue a career in Bremen.

1.2. Intensify the transfer of research findings

Application-oriented research in cooperation with the regional economy should be further intensified. In particular, the establishment and expansion of joint real-world laboratories in future-oriented fields such as digitalisation, climate protection, mobility transition and sustainable production can accelerate the development of marketable solutions and specifically strengthen regional value creation.

The transfer of knowledge and talent via interfaces and networks should also be structurally expanded, for example by bundling and better coordinating exchanges between universities, business, politics and society via a central contact point.

1.3. Visibility of the HSB's impact in the region

The HSB is recommended to hone a communication profile that emphasises its achievements that are already visible throughout the city. The applied nature of its research is estimated as being extremely useful to demonstrate the concrete impact of research on people's daily lives – whether it be on the city's bridges, buildings or health institutions. This could, for instance, be done via a communication campaign.

1.4. Contribute to the strategic internationalization of the region

The further development of strategies to attract and retain international students as future skilled workers is recommended. By expanding English-language programmes, offering targeted career and integration services, and working closely with regional businesses and authorities, international graduates can be integrated into regional labour market structures at an early stage and retained in the region in the long term.

The development of additional English-language master's programmes should be pursued in order to support regional companies in attracting and training urgently needed skilled workers.

2. Potential linkages with key developments in STARS EU

There is a significant overlap in the abovementioned recommendations and activities pursued in the context of STARS EU. For instance, several challenge-based formats have already been intensified in the context of BIPs, Future Labs and other jointly developed curricular modules. In 2026, the HSB will also offer a seminar on introducing practice-partners into teaching for the alliance. This issue will remain of high concern to the Challenge Lab and the Regional Transition Accelerator. STARS EU may prove to be an essential testing ground to establish formats such as living labs across disciplines.

Similarly, the Challenge Lab is working on concrete handbooks and seminars to assist knowledge and technology transfer into all nine regions. This may also contribute to the visibility of the HSB's research impact in Bremen (recommendation 1.3) - yet the recommendation to develop additional communication campaigns remains a valuable one.

Lastly – and perhaps most evidently – the HSB is now charged with leveraging STARS EU's contribution to the strategic internationalization of the HSB on a regional level, successively scaling up the circle of stakeholders and employers in the region which stand to profit.

3. How is the role and impact of the university assessed in relation to the most important regional challenges and strategies?

3.1. Contribution to innovation

As a research-intensive university of applied sciences, HSB plays a key role in regional development and competitiveness in the state of Bremen. Through its close integration of practice-oriented teaching, application-oriented research, internationalisation and targeted knowledge transfer, HSB makes a significant contribution to overcoming key regional challenges.

The HSB's professors and researchers received praise for their well-networked immersion in the most relevant science and practice communities in Bremen. Especially in specialist discourses, experts associated with the HSB are estimated to be very visible.

HSB furthermore acts as a strategic driver of innovation and a catalyst for regional transformation. With around 125 ongoing research projects, including numerous third-party funded projects and cooperative doctorates, it makes a substantial contribution to the regional science and innovation landscape. The existing interdisciplinary research clusters – including those on digitalisation, sustainability and aerospace – address key future issues for the state and develop practical solutions in collaboration with regional partners. The planned establishment and expansion of real-world laboratories will further accelerate the transfer of innovative research results to industry and society.

HSB is pursuing a long-term Transfer Strategy 2030, which aims to intensify the direct transfer of knowledge and technology between universities, business, politics, administration and society. Part of this strategy is to create a central point of contact for cooperation and transfer opportunities and to promote the targeted expansion of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary networks.

3.2. Contribution to the labour market

As a practice-oriented university, HSB makes a significant contribution to securing the regional demand for skilled workers. In addition to the range of undergraduate courses tailored to regional needs, a broad spectrum of dual and continuing education courses, which is to be continuously expanded, ensures that qualifications are needs-based and practical. Close cooperation with small and medium-sized enterprises strengthens key sectors of the regional economy in particular.

Still, there are visibility gaps that the university could help to bridge: Bremen is home to some very large international corporations and a vast and diverse network of SMEs. While the former are very visible in the labour market, the university could assist smaller SMEs in their visibility to young professionals.

3.3. **Contribution to regional transitions**

In the fields of energy (transition), circular economy and sustainable construction, the HSB is perceived as strongly involved. This pertains to the interns, graduates and researchers joining Bremen's workforce, as well as the research, projects and specialist conferences organized in the HSB's specific departments. Within these fields, the HSB is also taking an active role in regional fora.

In the BreGoS project, the HSB is also an actor in its own right – alongside all of Bremen's public universities, the HSB is developing options for action in the research fields of biodiversity, climate protection, mobility and resource conservation at its own locations and in its own social sphere of influence.

3.4. **Contribution to social/economic development**

With a high proportion of international degree programmes, a significantly above-average proportion of international students and an extensive network of international partners, HSB has a distinctly international profile. Participation in the European university alliance STARS EU opens up additional strategic opportunities to promote the development of international skills among students and staff through joint study programmes, the development of innovative teaching formats and structured mobility programmes. This creates important conditions for attracting international talent not only to the region. In the medium and long term, this strengthens the innovative power of regional companies and the university alike.

Especially the applied nature of the HSB's research and teaching is positively received. The university is observed as seeking continual opportunities for real-world transfer of research findings, as well as for opportunities to implement its teaching in practice.

4. **Strategic context**

4.1. **Smart Specialization Strategy (RIS3)**

Bremen's Innovation Strategy 2030 forms its contribution to the RIS3. It comprises the full "innovation value chain" – commencing with applied research. It defines five key innovation areas that are set to be tackled cross-sectorally. These areas meet an environment that is shaped by key technologies and key industries that are driving forth innovation.

The five key innovation areas and a few indicative links to the HSB's contribution are:

- **Sustainable management and resource efficiency:** The HSB offers degree programs in fields that contribute towards this innovation area, such as energy engineering, sustainable energy and environment systems, and energy engineering and management. Its researchers and teachers are represented and well-networked

in the relevant professional associations such as WAB e.V. (industry network for wind energy). HSB's research and teaching also contribute to key fields identified in the RIS3 strategy such as green hydrogen, maritime management and biomimetics.

- **Networked and adaptive industry:** The HSB makes major contributions to training qualified professionals in relation to the aerospace and maritime industries, as well as the automotive industry via its degree programmes in mechanical engineering.
- **Mobility of the future:** As a port city, port management and logistics are an important component of this key area. The HSB's research and degree programmes in Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering and Nautical and Maritime Transport are of special relevance. By way of its Degree Programmes in Electronics Engineering, the HSB also equips professionals with in-depth expertise on automation, robotics and industrial AI.
- **Intelligent services:** Bremen's innovation efforts in the field of health economy are supported by HSB's participation in the Integrated Health Campus – a network of actors from the fields of health research, training of health and nursing professions, health care industry and health care. Fields such as interdisciplinary sustainability management or practice research and innovation in social work contribute to driving forth innovative and interdisciplinary thinking in these sectors. Lastly, with degree programmes in sustainable business & entrepreneurship and related fields, the HSB's teaching portfolio complementarily skills entrepreneurs to detect and drive forward viable business models.
- **Digital transformation:** The successful digital transformation of Bremen's economy is vital for its survival. HSB has continually expanded its offer in electrical engineering and computer science to meet this need. Simultaneously, a growing number of degree programmes can be completed in an international or dual study mode, seeking to keep its teaching up to date with rapid technological developments.

The innovation strategy also refers to available services in Bremen's startup and entrepreneurship ecosystem. To this end, FreiRAUM@HSB represents the university both internally, as well as in relation to regional stakeholders as the central and interdisciplinary contact point for innovation and start-up projects of all kinds. Within the abovementioned key innovation areas, there are also strong topical links to the work that the STARS EU universities collaborate on through its Thematic Interest Groups (see 4.2).

4.2. Bremen's Science Plan 2025

An additional key document shaping the HSB's innovation environment is the Science Plan 2025, which defined key areas of focus for Bremen's science policy from the years 2020-2025. The plan is authored by the Senator for Environment, Climate, and Science Bremen (called Senator for Science, Health and Consumer Protection in the 2020 official document). As a public university and according to the German federal system, the HSB is mainly and primarily funded through this ministry, although the portions financed by third-party funds are increasingly significant.

Areas of strategic development in the Science Plan 2025 go beyond the academic. Some of the guiding principles in the strategic document are:

- **Growing city:** Not only Bremen, as a city-state, is growing, but alongside it also the need for specialised workers. Especially the universities of applied science are asked to accommodate for a growing number of students and to increase their marketing efforts to the general population.
- **Equal opportunities and good employment conditions:** The universities are asked to make an even greater commitment to efforts to achieve gender equality in science.
- **A high quality in studies and teaching:** Quality management, service and staffing decisions must be made to broaden the range of courses on offer by establishing new, attractive and innovative courses.
- **Maintaining and expanding research excellence:** Research and transfer activities of research institutes are being pooled to further increase the international visibility of Bremen's research and thus continuously improve the conditions for success in the Research Excellence Strategy – mainly relating to the University of Bremen.
- **Establish transfer strategies:** Knowledge and technology transfer should be geared towards regional economic clusters and focus on the innovation needs of regional SMEs. The aim is to create a broad culture of innovation and to position Bremen as an innovative business and science location. This must be a part of the universities' strategic development plans.
- **Actively shaping future issues:** Several future issues must be understood and tackled as cross-cutting concerns that span research, teaching, administration and infrastructure. They include: digitalisation, internationalisation/Europe, diversity/gender equality and sustainability.
- **Improve competitiveness:** To ensure successful completion of the previous principles, Bremen's universities must adhere to the standard equipment in research and teaching and science buildings must be renovated gradually. Additional permanent positions should be created in the universities.

The work developed by the STARS EU alliance is already well-positioned to contribute to several of these principles – by creating joint standards for teaching and learning, making the universities more visible and approachable to regional stakeholders and – not least – establishing ongoing expert groups (Thematic Interest Groups) related to nine key future topics: Energy Transition, Arts and Creative Industries, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, Sustainable Industry, Circular Economy, Digital Transformation, Healthy Ageing, Living Spaces und Inclusion & Social Justice.

4.3. Metropolitan Region Northwest: Framework for Action 2022-2025

The Metropolitan Region Northwest's most recent framework for action entitled "Northwest.Strong.Climate Neutral." was created in the years 2020-2021 and is strongly influenced by the EU's conversations surrounding the multiannual financial framework 2021-2027. Most notably, the document is shaped by the Green Deal with its central objective to reduce net emissions from greenhouse gases within the EU to zero by 2050.

As a region uniting urban centres, coastal ports and rural areas, the framework identifies three central innovation paths:

- Shaping climate neutrality and biodiversity
- Securing public service
- Driving sustainable and smart mobility

Across eight different fields of action, the HSB's researchers and teaching staff have become involved in multitudinous ways. For instance, with the project "Networking to strengthen businesses and promote more sustainable production through plastics recycling" the Institute for Energy, Recycling and Environmental Protection at Bremen University of Applied Sciences provided a direct contribution to the field of "resource efficiency".

A notable addition to the framework for action is the Hydrogen Strategy, in which green hydrogen and its derivatives are considered key building blocks towards the targeted climate neutrality.

5. Participation in key regional strategies of the next years

5.1. Next Innovation Strategy of Bremen State

The current Innovation Strategy 2030 already covers the first few years of the next Multiannual Financial Framework of the European Union (2028-2034). In late 2025, Bremen is approaching the midway point of the current innovation strategy. Nevertheless, the asynchrony of the two strategic periods may demand that the Senator for Economic Affairs, Ports and Transformation Bremen look ahead towards the creation of the next Innovation Strategy. This, however, will be tackled upon commencement of the next multiannual financial framework.

The HSB's will contribute its strategic development plan 2030 and its transfer strategy 2030 towards this process. Additional modes of participation will be decided upon closer to the date.

5.2. Bremen's Science Plan 2030

The development of Bremen's subsequent Science Plan, notably covering the years 2026-2030, has been well underway throughout the year 2025. The plan is currently in the parliamentary process and has been presented to the parliamentary Science Committee at the beginning of October 2025. Actively providing feedback on the planned strategies developed by the Senator for Environment, Climate, and Science Bremen is an essential part of its development process. To this end, the HSB has also consulted with other public universities in Bremen. Topics and strategic aims to foster living-lab formats, dual study programs, the international orientation of HSB as well as to strengthen applied research will play a crucial role in the new plan.

5.3. Framework for Action in the Metropolitan Region Northwest 2026 onwards

The Metropolitan Region Northwest's next framework for action is being prepared during the years 2024-2026. The process is funded by a national German ministry and explores how

regional development and regional planning can be strategically interlinked. It is already confirmed that regional challenges relating to energy transformation will be tackled through this strategy. This is especially important as Northwest Metropolitan Region would be able to cover the entire value chain – from generation, storage, import and transport to application – of a potential future CO₂-neutral energy industry.

The HSB has been involved through the provision of workshop rooms in its Center for Computer Science and Media Technologies, but not yet in the agenda-setting of the document. This could be an area of further exploration.

B) Hanze, Groningen, Northern Netherlands

Summary of the meeting with the regional authorities: Province of Groningen and the Assembly of the Northern Provinces (SNN)

The meeting was organized to get insight in the most relevant and up to date developments in the regional policies in the Northern Netherlands regarding STARS EU priority areas. Future developments including the RIS strategy 2028 - 2034 and the role and appreciation of the Hanze were discussed.

Main conclusions and recommendations

The most relevant policies for regional development and innovation regarding STARS EU priority areas are ERDF and the new Policy/Fund Nij Begun.

The expectation is that the content of the Northern Netherlands (NNL) RIS3 will not change dramatically, so the focus on the transitions in digital, health, circular economy and energy will remain, meaning that the STARS EU strategy on these areas can be continued and further developed.

Contribution to the improvement of the governance on NNL level is an important issue, especially now the new policy Nij Begun started. A coherent strategy based on RIS3 should be the core of the programming of ERDF and Nij Begun. Hanze/STARS EU and other regional partners, should align the activities/projects based on this strategy, in a better way to achieve more impact in the region.

The creation process for the RIS3 2028 – 2034 hasn't started yet but is expected to begin in the autumn. The Hanze is involved in one of the first activities and should try to make a coordinated effort to contribute to the new RIS3 strategy.

Financial shifts in Europe will most likely put pressure on available funds for innovation/research, this can influence the capacity and impact of Hanze/STARS EU and can lead to more direct assignments. In the case of the NNL, the Nij Begun fund can generate some new perspectives.

Current Position and Appreciation

- Hanze University plays active roles in various parts of the governance structure of the Northern Netherlands (NNL).
- Hanze is highly visible and actively involved in regional activities, contributing significantly to all RIS transitions in the region (digital, health, circular economy, energy).
- Its contribution is mainly at project level, which is crucial in NNL since research and development are largely driven by public entities. On indicators like private sector R&D spending, patent applications, design submissions, and employment in knowledge-intensive sectors, the Northern Netherlands scores lower than the national average.
- The regional authority (provinces/SNN) has limited insight into regular activities and their impact.
- A critical issue for all NNL partners is the lack of coherence among projects, which diminishes overall impact.

The main cause cited is insufficient governance and coordination. Although there are various consultation and alignment structures in NNL, they often lack direction due to limited mandates.

Despite a collaborative spirit, openness, bottom-up energy, and a “can-do” mentality, the region struggles with strategic direction, integrated thinking, and synergy exploitation.

There's broad consensus that promising actions and developments are underway across different areas. The region has ample knowledge and expertise, and stakeholders are action-oriented and entrepreneurial. However, working systematically toward a goal rooted in a clear vision remains a challenge. A purpose-driven movement toward distinctive new strengths is often missing, leading to inefficiencies.

Suggestions for Improvement

- Contribute to improving governance on NNL level, but also on institutional level: The University of the North (UvhN) is mentioned as a potential central coordination point for all knowledge institutions in the region, though this isn't yet functioning effectively.

New RIS3 strategy process and programming for 2028–2034

- The RIS3 process hasn't started yet but is expected to begin in the autumn.
- A two-day peer review event by the EU Policy Learning Platform is scheduled for late October, focusing on NNL RIS3 governance issues. Hanze will host the first day of this event. Several Hanze stakeholders are involved.

Developments/trends:

- The actual situation in Europe will lead to financial shifts between EU programs. The focus on security/defence and resilience may lead to more assignments and responsibilities on national level, potentially influencing the innovation culture. Shifts in funding may have also other negative impacts: less money and more assignments can easily lead to more centralized/national control and less regional autonomy.
On EU policy/program level this could impact the ERDF program in the NNL. The expectation is that the amounts will be lower and maybe centralised and or contain more direct assignments, influencing the research and innovation character.
- The expectation is that the content of the NNL RIS3 will not change dramatically, so the focus on digital, health, circular economy, energy will remain.
- Also caused by the actual situation in Europe there is a tendency towards: 'Keep it simple and deliver!' This could influence the real research and innovation character of the strategy.
- Developments in AI are not yet significantly felt, but this can quickly change
- In the Northern Netherlands a new major funding stream: **Nij Begun (New Start)** is launched. This is a 30 year funding stream that will bring every year € 100 million for an economic agenda and € 130 million for a social agenda in the province of Groningen. Compared to other EU funding streams this is a huge amount of money. Historically the RIS3 strategy was connected to the EU ERDF program, but it had always the intention to be a regional strategy that would align all financial resources. In the NNL this will be a very important issue. As already mentioned: there is a lack of governance in the NNL, and maybe also on institutional level, which now already leads to inefficiencies.

C UAMD, Albania/Durres

Summary of the meeting of the UAMD with the regional authorities: Municipality of Durres and Prefecture of Durres County

The meeting was organized following the general elections, at the beginning of the new parliamentary legislature and new government program, for the 2025-2029 period, to get insights over the impact of the main focus of Albanian government – the EU Integration in 2030, on regional policies in Durres County.

Main conclusions and recommendations

The most relevant challenges derive from the uncertainty of the future status of Regions and Municipalities in Albania. Expectedly, prior to the 2027 local elections, a deep Territorial Reform will take place. According to that, Albania might have only 5-6 Regions and instead of 61 municipalities, to a substantially lower number.

That would open the possibility to have RIS3 in Regional level, instead of the actual S3 nationally. This would give UAMD and STARS EU Alliance a good chance to share its knowledge and contribute in the most relevant policies for regional development and innovation, in helping the drafting and crafting of a RIS3 for Durres Region.

The expectation is that the content of the Durres Region Development Strategy, to RIS3 will not change dramatically, so the focus on Tourism, Trade, and Transport, will remain the main pillars, followed by maritime, digital, health, agriculture and circular economy, this meaning that the STARS EU strategy on these areas can be continued and further developed.

Contribution to the creation of a functional network, as a basis for better involvement and improvement of stakeholder contributions in the governance on regional level is an important issue, especially in the framework of quintuple helix. STARS EU Alliance and its regional public authority partners, would serve as “best practices” for Durres Region, and this might open opportunities for common projects based on future RIS3, to achieve more impact in the region.

Current Position and Appreciation

- University “Aleksander Moisiu” Durres (UAMD), still doesn’t play most of the role a university must play in city and region’s governance structure in Durres, despite being the second largest higher education institution in Albania. This is due to the lack of a functional stakeholder network.
- UAMD aims to be highly visible and actively involved with its stakeholders, business, civil society and public authorities, in regional and national activities. UAMD role as a HEI is mainly focused in educating young professionals, thus contributing to the region strategic development (tourism, trade and transport, digital, health, maritime, and circular economy).
- Its major contribution has been at supplying high level qualified young professionals. In the last seven years UAMD is actively present in project level too. Unfortunately,

there are some difficulties in joining the common efforts with the regional public authorities in joint and mutually beneficial research and projects. Research and development are largely driven by UAMD, mainly through PhD Programmes, and its aim to serve the region's needs would bridge those difficulties.

- The missing of a functional network gives space to a wick involvement of regional authorities in UAMD life, and vice-versa, thus offering a very limited insight and short-sighted view on prosperous future activities and impactful initiatives.
- The lack of coordination and coherence among stakeholders, on the paths toward a common vision for the future, may be seen in the small, almost inexistent, number of joint projects.

There's broad consensus that the regional actors must formalize and keep it functional a Regional Network, in order to lead all their efforts toward a common shared vision, behaving this way as helixes.

Suggestions for Improvement

- UAMD must move from the “comfort zone” of an HEI and take an active role in the region's life; chose a ‘push’ strategy for the creation of the above-mentioned Regional Network and take its lead. UAMD has the necessary knowledge “pool” and credentials for dealing with XXI century challenges.

New RIS3 strategy process and programming for 2028–2034

- UAMD must take the lead for communicating and coordinating the preparations for the first Durres Region RIS3. This mean a New Deal, a process difficult to be recognized and accepted by the stakeholders, as far as Albania has not RIS3 on regional level, but only S3.
- UAMD must begin to behave as a risk-taker and show its entrepreneurial mind-set. UAMD need to acknowledge that, especially if there will be a new Territorial Reform in 2027, then it will remain a very little time to synergize with stakeholders and “have a place in the table”, and “a voice on the chapter” in regional policies and Durres Region RIS3 preparation process.

Developments/trends:

- The current Albanian government program focus is Albania EU Integration in 2030. All the activities will focus on “doing the homework” for each Chapter. This will mean both pressure and opportunities – it depends on how you approach it.
- The current Territorial configuration is expected to change. UAMD must be prepared for being part of the “New Territorial Reform” by offering specialized expertise and scientific argumentations.
- Predictions are that with the “New Territorial Reform” Albanian Spatial Planning and Economic Regions will change dramatically, and there will be the need for a wise leadership. UAMD must be prepared to take this role.

- Mainly, the new and enlarged Regions will need applied research and knowledge co-creation, through formalized and structured platforms. This is “sine qua non” for the involvement of all the stakeholders, toward a “Common Future of the Region”.
- Our newly appointed Albanian government has its first “AI Minister - Diella”. This means that as a Region, but as far as UAMD is a public HEI we must be prepared for it too, we must be prepared for the requests, as for an “up-down” approach in hierarchy, to have organizational “AI X”.
- UAMD is part of the European University Alliance, STARS EU. This comes with great opportunities and benefits, and with commitments too. UAMD is clearly fortunate to get and offer valuable contributions and make use of this knowledge hub, for joint projects, thus bringing closer the Alliance partners and regional stakeholders. In doing that, we will reach financial sustainability for our Regions and our Alliance.

D. Polytechnic University Braganca, Portugal/Norte

Summary of the Discussion with Local/Regional Authorities: The Role of IPB in Regional Development

This document synthesizes the role and impact of the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB) in the regions of Trás-os-Montes and Alto Tâmega and Barroso, focusing on regional challenges and development strategies, such as RIS3 NORTE and other local initiatives.

Regional authorities:

- Intermunicipal Community of Alto Terras de Trás-os-Montes (CIMTTM)
- Intermunicipal Community of Alto Tâmega and Barroso (CIMAT)

1 Context

1.1 Regional Contextualization

The regions of “Trás-os-Montes” and “Alto Tâmega e Barroso” face challenges typical of rural areas, such as:

- Depopulation and aging population: Rural desertification and youth migration to urban areas are central issues.
- Low population density: This makes it difficult to develop infrastructure and attract private investment.
- Dependence on traditional sectors: Agriculture, livestock, and some older industries with little innovation or modernization.
- However, these regions also have specific potential, such as high-quality agriculture, nature tourism, cultural heritage, and renewable energy opportunities.

1.2 Smart Specialization Strategy (RIS3)

RIS3 is an essential pillar of regional development, and IPB has played a key role in implementing its various dimensions. RIS3 is centred on identifying areas of regional competitive potential and concentrating resources on innovation to strengthen these sectors. Some RIS3 areas directly linked to IPB include:

- Agroindustry and Precision Agriculture: Trás-os-Montes is known for high-quality agriculture, especially olive oil, wine, Chestnuts, and cereals. IPB has supported

modernization through smart agriculture, developing IT-based solutions, sensors, and drones to increase production efficiency and environmental sustainability.

- **Sustainable Tourism:** The region has great potential for rural and eco-tourism. IPB has worked on integrating digital technologies, such as smart booking platforms, tourist flow data analysis, and digital promotion. It also promotes smart tourism destinations.
- **Digital Technologies and Creative Industries:** A regional RIS3 focus is digital transformation, with developments in digital platforms, Big Data, IoT, and AI. IPB invests in technology excellence centres to train qualified professionals to transform the business fabric of the region.
- **Renewable Energy:** With growing emphasis on solar and biomass, IPB participates in developing sustainable technologies and leveraging local resources for energy transition.

2 What is the actual opinion about the role/impact of the IPB in the region, related to the most important challenges in the region and the RIS3 strategies and other important strategies of the region?

2.1 Contribution to Innovation

The IPB is a catalyst for innovation through its mission of creating, transmitting, and disseminating technical-scientific and professional knowledge. It promotes applied research and experimental development, transferring technology to regional companies. Its action within the quadruple helix (academia, industry, government, society) is crucial for connecting scientific knowledge with practical needs, driving innovation in sectors such as value-added agriculture, tourism, and mobility and environmental industries (aligned with NORTE RIS3).

In this way, the IPB plays a crucial role in transferring technologies to the local market, both through partnerships with companies and through the creation of startups and business incubators.

2.2 Contribution to the labor market

The IPB trains qualified professionals in various areas, essential for economic dynamism and for meeting the needs of the regional labor market. By offering quality higher education, it contributes to retaining young people and talent, combating desertification, and increasing the availability of specialized labor in the region. Thus, the IPB has a significant impact on the labor market of the Trás-os-Montes and Alto Tâmega e Barroso regions, not only through the training of new professionals but also through the strengthening of skills and employability:

- **Professional Qualification:** The IPB offers higher education programs aligned with regional and global needs, such as engineering, information technology, business management, agri-food, and health. These courses directly address the shortage of qualified labor in emerging and technological areas.
- **Continuous Training and Skills Upgrading:** In addition to initial training, the IPB invests in continuous training, with courses that allow working professionals to update

or retrain their skills, especially in the areas of digital transformation, energy management, and green industries. This training is essential to maintain the competitiveness of companies in the region.

- **Employment and Talent Retention:** The IPB has been developing programs to encourage local entrepreneurship, creating conditions for graduates to create companies and generate local employment. The incubator program and support for startups have been essential to encourage young people to stay in the region and contribute to the local economy.

2.3 Contribution to regional transitions (energy, digital, green)

The IPB's vision is to be an institution committed to the sustainable development of its region, leading innovation for the transition towards carbon neutrality and environmental sustainability. Its schools (e.g., Agriculture, Technology) can develop skills and projects in the green economy, renewable energies, and digitalization, aligning with the Strategic Guidelines (Greener Alto Tâmega) of the Alto Tâmega 2030 Strategy and the environmental domains of NORTE RIS3.

2.4 Contribution to social/economic development

The IPB is a fundamental engine of economic, social, and cultural development. Through training, research, and connection to society, it contributes to economic diversification, the valorisation of local products (olive oil, wine, sausages), the promotion of tourism (including thermal and rural), and the improvement of the population's quality of life. Its presence enriches the cultural and social environment of the region. The impact of the IPB on the region's socioeconomic development is notable in various areas:

- **Regional and Social Development:** The IPB acts as an engine of development, not only economic but also social. It promotes social inclusion by providing access to higher education for young people from rural areas and encouraging community participation in regional innovation and sustainability projects.
- **Support for Local Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Through support for entrepreneurship and the creation of startups, the IPB has contributed to the generation of local wealth and the creation of new jobs. Business incubation and acceleration initiatives, along with knowledge transfer, have helped companies in the region become more competitive, promoting the development of new markets.

2.5 Contribution and role in regional governance

The IPB actively participates in the elaboration and implementation of regional development strategies, such as the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy (EIDT) of Terras de Trás-os-Montes and the Alto Tâmega 2030 Strategy. Its expertise and human and scientific resources are mobilized to align training and research priorities with the funding and territorial development objectives defined by government entities, acting as a strategic partner in the quadruple helix. It plays a relevant role in regional governance, being directly involved in various political and strategic initiatives and decisions:

- **Participation in Regional Networks:** Over time, the IPB has been a strategic ally of local and regional authorities in developing public policies focused on sustainable development, innovation, and social cohesion. The IPB actively participates in defining RIS3 strategies for the regions and in implementing joint projects with other higher education institutions, companies, and local governments.
- **Partnerships with Municipalities and Regional Entities:** The IPB has been an important partner in regional development strategies, such as within the scope of the Development Plan for the Trás-os-Montes and Alto Douro Region. It also participates in territorial promotion initiatives aimed at attracting investments, especially in technological infrastructure and industrial parks.

2.6 Contribution to the general well-being of the region

By retaining a qualified population, boosting the economy, promoting innovation, and contributing to environmental sustainability, the IPB improves the general well-being of the region. The offer of higher education and the promotion of culture and knowledge elevate human and social capital, creating a more prosperous environment with better opportunities for citizens.

2.7 Contribution to the general prosperity of the region

The IPB is crucial for the region's prosperity by driving economic growth, competitiveness, and innovation. Its ability to generate knowledge and form human capital is fundamental for the implementation of the strategic guidelines of Alto Tâmega 2030, especially in the areas of innovation and knowledge, sustainability, and social development, which are pillars for lasting prosperity.

3 Suggestions for better alignment of IPB's research and training agendas (STARS EU priority areas) with regional needs and objectives

3.1 Implementation of local innovation strategies:

The IPB can intensify the creation of open labs and incubation centres that facilitate direct collaboration with local SMEs, focusing on solutions for specific regional challenges.

3.2 Academia-industry linkage

Strengthen internship programs and joint research projects with companies, ensuring that curricula and research directly respond to the technological and qualification needs of the regional industry. Create matchmaking platforms between IPB researchers and companies.

3.3 Bringing actors together in the region

The IPB can take an even more proactive role in organizing forums, workshops, and seminars that bring together representatives from academia, industry, government, and civil

society to discuss and co-create solutions to regional challenges. Its participation in regional networks and clusters should be continued and strengthened.

3.4 Alignment with NORTE RIS3 domains

Continue to align the training offering and research lines with the priority areas of RIS3 NORTE (Food and Environmental Systems, Mobility and Environment Industries, Advanced Production Systems, Health and Life Sciences, Human Capital and Specialized Services), ensuring that training and research generate a direct impact on these strategic areas.

3.5 Focus on the Strategic Guidelines of the "Alto Tâmega 2030 Strategy"

Direct research and project development programs towards the Strategic Guidelines of the "Alto Tâmega 2030 Strategy", especially in "Smarter Alto Tâmega" (innovation and knowledge), "Greener Alto Tâmega" (sustainability and energy transition), and "More social Alto Tâmega" (social and demographic development).

3.6 Promotion of Social and Sustainable Entrepreneurship:

Foster social entrepreneurship by supporting the creation of companies focused on social impact and environmental sustainability. This promotes innovative business models that address local challenges, such as sustainable natural resource management, sustainable agriculture, and social inclusion.

Enhance mentoring and support for new entrepreneurs: Provide mentoring and training programs for young entrepreneurs, enabling them to transform innovative ideas into viable businesses that create jobs and generate local value.

4 Participation in the elaboration of the new RIS3 Strategy (2028 -- 2034)

Yes, the IPB is a key partner and has already demonstrated its ability to provide input into regional strategic processes, as evidenced by its contribution to the Integrated Territorial Development Strategy for the Trás-os-Montes Region and the Alto Tâmega 2030 Strategy.

The RIS3 development process is coordinated by the Regional Coordination and Development Commissions (CCDRs), specifically the CCDR-Norte in the case of the IPB and the Trás-os-Montes, Alto Tâmega, and Barroso region.

These entities should include the main regional stakeholders, following the quadruple helix model: Academia (universities, polytechnics, research centres), Industry/Businesses, Public Administration, and Civil Society.

The IPB is, therefore, a natural and essential stakeholder in the process of building the regional RIS3. In previous years (such as RIS3 2014–2020 and RIS3 Norte 2030), the IPB was involved in thematic working groups, public consultations, and technical contributions.

Although there is no final public documentation for RIS3 2028–2034 yet (as it is still in its early stages), the IPB can and should proactively position itself as a partner and influencer in the initial phases, which include:

- Mapping regional scientific and technological capabilities
- Identifying emerging priority domains
- Proposals for leveraging innovation in strategic sectors
- Participating in workshops, public consultations, and technical hearings
- Promoting local forums with regional stakeholders, such as companies, business associations, municipalities, and civil society.

The possibilities for the IPB to contribute to the new RIS3 strategy (2028–2034) are as follows:

4.1 Active participation in working groups.

The IPB should be invited to participate in the working groups and committees responsible for designing the new RIS3, ensuring that the perspective of academia and research is duly considered.

4.2 Provision of data and analyses.

The IPB can provide studies, data, and analyses on technological trends, qualification needs, and innovation opportunities in the region, informing the definition of new priority areas.

4.3 Proposal of new specialization domains.

Based on its research and knowledge of global and regional trends, IPB can propose new domains of smart specialization that align with its areas of expertise and the region's development potential.

4.4 Organization of consultations and workshops.

The IPB can co-organize public consultation events and workshops with regional stakeholders to gather input and promote a participatory process in the construction of the new RIS3.

4.5 Strengthening of the quadruple helix.

Continue to strengthen its position as one of the pillars of the quadruple helix, ensuring that the voice of academia is heard and integrated into strategic decisions for the future of the region.

5 Conclusion

The Polytechnic Institute of Bragança is a key catalyst for the development of the Trás-os-Montes, Alto Tâmega, and Barroso regions. By promoting professional qualifications, technology transfer, and innovation in areas with the greatest strategic potential, the IPB helps reduce regional asymmetries and build a more diversified and resilient economy.

The implementation of RIS3 strategies in areas such as precision agriculture, sustainable tourism, and renewable energy aligns with the region's development needs and the European Union's priorities for a greener and more digital economy.

The major challenge, however, will be to ensure greater connectivity and the continuous retraining of local populations, so that the benefits of higher education and innovation are felt in the long term throughout the region.

E. University West, Sweden/Västra Götaland

Summary of the meetings with regional authorities and municipalities in Fyrbodal

University West maintains regular contact with the Fyrbodal Municipal Association, the Västra Götaland Region, and the City of Trollhättan. During our meetings, we discuss how we can jointly address the challenges we face, both in the municipalities and in the region as a whole.

On 5 September, University West gathered the Director of the Fyrbodal Municipal Association and the municipal directors of the fourteen municipalities in the association to discuss how we can best work together to meet challenges and how the university can contribute to strengthening regional development.

The summary below reflects the discussions from the meeting on 5 September and our ongoing contacts with the Fyrbodal Municipal Association, the Västra Götaland Region, and the City of Trollhättan.

Main conclusions and recommendations

The most relevant strategies for regional development are The Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland 2021–2030 and the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, Strengthening Innovation Capacity 2022–2025. These strategies are closely aligned with the STARS EU priority areas, including digital transformation, green transition, healthy ageing, and inclusive development.

The Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland is being revised and the preparation of responses to the draft is ongoing. The updated strategy is expected to be decided in early 2026.

The revised strategy places greater emphasis on international competitiveness, skills development linked to the green and digital transition, and the role of civil society and the social economy in regional development. A major change in the revised strategy concerns the cross-sectoral focus areas. Three new focus areas have been highlighted: *Green Industrial Transition*, *Preparing Children and Young People for the Future*, and *Increased Resilience through Collaboration in Spatial Planning*.

The revised Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland focuses on emerging societal challenges that underscore the need for enhanced regional preparedness and resilience. Geopolitical instability, declining trust in institutions and mental health issues among young people are identified as threats to long-term development capacity. In response, a new cross-sectoral focus area, *Increased resilience through collaboration in spatial planning*, has been introduced, aiming to strengthen crisis preparedness and coordination.

Regarding the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, there are proposals for slightly revised wording for clarification, but no direct revision.

Digitalisation and the development of AI present major opportunities, but also ethical and social challenges. Issues related to privacy, accessibility, and skills provision need to be addressed proactively to prevent technological advancement from creating new divides.

Current positions and appreciation

University West is recognised as a visible and active partner in regional development. Its contributions to applied research, work-integrated learning, and inclusive education are particularly valued. These areas are essential for addressing regional skills gaps, supporting industrial transformation, and fostering social cohesion.

Despite this, regional authorities often lack insight into the university's ongoing activities and their impact. A more systematic and transparent approach to collaboration could enhance mutual understanding and strategic alignment. Municipalities express a strong interest in faster, more flexible mechanisms for connecting their needs with the university's resources, particularly in relation to internships, thesis projects, and collaborative research.

The municipalities in Fyrbodalen and University West share a common ambition to deepen and structure their collaboration to address the region's challenges and opportunities in areas such as innovation, labour market, transition, social and economic development, and sustainability. There are already many good examples of cooperation, but also a clear desire to take the next step towards more systematic forms. The university's investments in distributed education and inclusive recruitment contribute to increasing access to higher education across the region, thereby strengthening both equality and resilience.

There is a great need to develop collaboration around internships, degree projects, and research projects. Municipalities are calling for faster and more flexible processes to connect their needs with University West's education and research resources. Innovation and applied research are central elements of collaboration. Municipalities are interested in contributing to research, for example by offering internships, participating in projects, or co-financing doctoral students. However, better funding models and support for joint research applications are needed to make this a reality.

Several municipalities emphasise the importance of strengthening their preparedness and express a need for collaboration with the university on skills development, knowledge exchange and new working methods related to total defence and societal resilience.

The transition to a sustainable society is another important driver. University West is seen as a key player in providing the region with the right skills for the future labour market, especially in technical administrations and the healthcare sector. Municipalities also want to see University West as a clear partner in developing new working methods and solutions for welfare. University West has a strong profile in applied research and work-integrated learning, making it particularly well-suited to lead projects that combine academic knowledge with practical solutions.

In summary, there is a strong desire to enhance collaboration between University West and the municipalities in Fyrbodalen. It is about building long-term relationships, creating mutual benefit, and jointly contributing to sustainable and inclusive regional development.

Strategic partnership with the City of Trollhättan

Through a strategic partnership, University West and the City of Trollhättan are deepening our collaboration to address some of the city's most pressing societal challenges. Two priority areas have been identified: the development of Trollhättan as a hub for sustainable energy, and long-term efforts to reduce segregation.

As partners we are working together to position Trollhättan as a regional centre for electrification and the green energy transition in West Sweden. By bringing together academia, industry, the public sector and civil society, we aim to create a joint platform for skills development, research and innovation. The goal is to build a strong innovation cluster that attracts investment, international talent and new enterprises.

Trollhättan is one of Sweden's most segregated cities, and together with Trollhättan we have recognised the need for a long-term, knowledge-based approach to reverse this trend. Through the project *Trollhättan for All – Building Inclusion by Understanding Place*, place-based methods for citizen engagement and social sustainability are being developed. As part of this effort, University West, the City of Trollhättan and the regional collaboration platform Wexsus have launched a seminar series aimed at building a knowledge alliance on segregation.

This collaborative work is strongly aligned with the updated Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland, which highlights the importance of green industrial transition, increased inclusion and resilience through cross-sectoral cooperation.

By contributing to climate-neutral innovation, advancing inclusive education and skills development, and fostering citizen engagement in disadvantaged areas, the partnership between University West and the City of Trollhättan reflects STARS EU's commitment to building a stronger, greener and fairer Europe. The work on sustainable energy aligns with STARS EU's focus on green industrial policies and integrated energy solutions, while the efforts to address segregation support the alliance's goals of social equity, healthy ageing and cultural inclusion.

University West's Contributions to Regional Development

Contribution to Innovation

University West contributes via applied research, the Co-op model, the Primus research environment and innovation advisory services to researchers and students. University West is active in regional innovation systems and aims to expand its role in test and demonstration environments.

Contribution to Labour Market

University West educates both new and experienced professionals, with a strong profile in work-integrated learning. It leads in widening participation, attracting students from non-academic backgrounds. University West supports competence transition but requires increased national funding to meet demand.

Contribution to Transitions (Energy, Digital, Green)

University West's research and education in sustainable industry, digitalisation, and AI aligns with regional transition goals. It supports circular business models and resource-efficient production, contributing to the region's green and digital transformation.

Contribution to Social/Economic Development

University West strengthens local development through collaboration with municipalities in health care, education, and social services. Its programs and research support welfare systems and regional academic growth.

Contribution and Role in Regional Governance

University West participates in strategic dialogues and policy consultations. It advocates for structured collaboration platforms, such as annual planning cycles and designated contact persons, to improve coordination and impact.

Contribution to Overall Well-being of the Region

University West enhances well-being by educating healthcare professionals and conducting research on youth and inclusion. Its presence reduces geographic education gaps and promotes democratic participation.

Contribution to Broad Prosperity of the Region

University West enhances regional attractiveness through international recruitment and partnerships. Its growth ambitions support employment, competence supply, and innovation, positioning University West as a hub for regional collaboration.

Suggestions for improvement

Current collaboration is often driven by local initiatives and engagement, but fragmented project structures and limited mandates hinder scalability and strategic alignment. There is a clear opportunity to strengthen governance both regionally and institutionally.

University West can serve as a neutral platform for collaboration among municipalities, businesses, civil society, and the region. Establishing structured forums and contact points will facilitate strategic cooperation.

Although University West is an active player in the region, many municipalities and regional organisations find it difficult to gain an overview of the university's ongoing initiatives and their impacts. To increase transparency and accessibility, more systematic communication is needed, both internally and externally. It may also mean that the university actively participates in regional networks and forums, where its role and resources are clarified.

Such visibility not

only strengthens the university's legitimacy but also facilitates the matching of local needs with academic expertise.

Strategies for Regional Development in Västra Götaland

The most relevant strategies for regional development are *The Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland 2021–2030* and the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, *Strengthening Innovation Capacity 2022–2025*.

Draft version of updated Regional Development Strategy

The Regional Development Strategy is being revised during 2025, with a draft version

circulated in spring 2025. The draft includes several important changes compared to the original strategy from 2021. The overall goal remains: to make Västra Götaland a model for the transition to a sustainable and competitive society. However, the time horizon has been extended to 2045 to emphasise the need for long-term planning.

The four long-term priorities, strengthening innovation capacity, building competence, increasing inclusion, and connecting Västra Götaland, remain but have been clarified. The strategy now has a clearer focus on international competitiveness, skills provision linked to green and digital transition, and the role of civil society and the social economy in development work.

A major change concerns the cross-sectoral initiatives. The previous four initiatives, *Completed Studies*, *Digitalisation*, *Electrification*, and *Circular Business Models*, have been replaced by three new ones: *Green Industrial Transition*, *Preparing Children and Youth for the Future*, and *Increased Resilience through Collaboration in Spatial Planning*. These new focus areas were selected based on current societal challenges and the need to coordinate resources and efforts for greater impact.

The strategy has also been updated with a deeper analysis of societal challenges. New challenges highlighted include geopolitical instability, rapid technological development in AI, youth mental health issues and recruitment into criminal networks, and declining trust in society and democracy. Climate change and biodiversity loss have gained increased importance in the strategy.

Implementation is emphasised more strongly in the draft, with a focus on collaboration between actors, joint analyses and future scenarios, and the use of digitalisation and AI as tools for governance and decision-making. The strategy's connection to Agenda 2030 has been clarified, as has the need to manage goal conflicts.

In summary, the draft version represents an update and strengthening of the existing strategy, with clearer direction, deeper analysis, and new areas of collaboration to meet current and future challenges.

University West's response to the draft

University West responded to the draft. We emphasised that the four long-term priorities remain relevant and that the updated descriptions capture the key challenges and opportunities ahead. We also described where we believe we as a HEI can best contribute, for example within the priority of strengthening innovation capacity, where we see good opportunities to contribute with research-based innovations.

We highlighted that the university's two complete academic environments, Work-Integrated Learning and Production Technology, are highly relevant to the strategic effort on Green Industrial Transition. The research environment Primus, which connects technology and learning, provides the university with strong opportunities to contribute to the green transition of industry.

We stressed University West's profile in work-integrated learning and highlighted the importance of collaboration to meet future skills needs. We already educate both new and experienced professionals and develop courses in close dialogue with working life.

We believe that the focus on increased inclusion can be supported by University West, which actively works with broadened recruitment and support for underrepresented groups in higher education.

University West stated that we see good opportunities to contribute to the three new initiatives: green industrial transition, preparing children and youth for the future, and increased resilience through collaboration in spatial planning. Within green industrial transition, the research environments in work-integrated learning and production technology are particularly relevant.

University West expressed support for the guiding principles in the strategy. We emphasise the importance of building ideas from the ground up and that collaboration based on actors' strengths is crucial. Incentive funding, networks, and other tools can contribute to successful implementation.

University West emphasised opportunities offered by the long-term collaboration within the European University Alliance STARS EU. The university highlighted that this partnership holds significant potential to enhance cooperation between Västra Götaland and other European regions and higher education institutions.

Next step

The preparation of responses to the draft is ongoing, and the updated strategy is expected to be decided in early 2026. Regarding the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy, there are proposals for slightly revised wording for clarification, but no direct revision.

Developments/trends

The region continues to face challenges in education, innovation, and sustainability. The revised Regional Development Strategy and the Smart Specialisation Strategy provide a renewed framework for addressing these issues. These strategies are closely aligned with the STARS EU priority areas, including digital transformation, green transition, healthy ageing, and inclusive development.

Despite strong commitment and favourable conditions, several structural barriers limit the joint development potential of the university and the region. Fragmented governance and a lack of strategic coordination mean that many initiatives remain local and short-term, making scalability and long-term impact more difficult. At the same time, changes in European funding structures may reduce access to resources for innovation and collaboration, particularly for smaller actors.

Digitalisation and the development of AI present major opportunities, but also ethical and social challenges. Issues related to privacy, accessibility, and skills provision need to be addressed proactively to prevent technological advancement from creating new divides.

The revised Regional Development Strategy for Västra Götaland highlights emerging societal challenges that underscore the need for enhanced regional preparedness and resilience. Geopolitical instability, declining trust in institutions and mental health issues among young people are identified as threats to long-term development capacity. In response, a new cross-sectoral focus area, *Increased resilience through collaboration in*

spatial planning, has been introduced, aiming to strengthen crisis preparedness and coordination. The strategy also emphasises the importance of scenario planning, joint analyses and digital tools for governance, reflecting a broader and more integrated approach to total defence.

F. Cracow University of Technology, Poland

Summary of the discussion with regional and local authorities Malopolska and Kraków.

1. REGIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

1.1 Regional Malopolska context

The Malopolska Development Strategy is the basic and most important document of the regional self-government, defining the areas, goals and directions of development policy interventions carried out in the regional space. The current Małopolska Development Strategy 2030 was adopted on 17 December 2020 and must be updated by 31 December 2026.

The Management Board of the Małopolska Region announced work on updating the current strategy and defined in June 2025 the most important challenges facing the region, which are:

- security, including energy security,
- migrant policy,
- negative birth rate,
- digitization and computerization in the context of artificial intelligence,
- drought prevention,

The need to update the strategy results from formal reasons and the need to take into account the changes that have taken place in recent years in the world and the work carried out by the government on new strategic documents, it is justified to conduct a re-analysis of the socio-economic situation, also taking into account the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is also necessary to take into account the consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, security aspects in its various dimensions, and issues related to the region's resilience to successive economic crises and the ongoing climate and energy crisis in Europe. The law has also changed, according to which the voivodeship's development strategy must now take into account new elements related to the integration of socio-economic planning with spatial planning. The updated strategy must be adopted by December 31, 2026.

Along with the update of the voivodeship's development strategy, the strategy of smart specialization of the region with technologies related to energy security and artificial intelligence will be modified.

1.2 Local Kraków context

The City of Kraków has a vision of the future called the Krakow Development Strategy Here I want to live. Krakow 2030. This document updates the Development Strategy of Krakow from 2005, i.e. it redirects the development of the city in the next dozen or so years. It is the result of a participatory process that began in 2013.

The mission of the Krakow Development Strategy 2030 is to create a smart metropolis that ensures a high quality of life, build a creative economy, shape the spatial environment, respect the natural environment and develop cultural potential, through cooperation between entities from different sectors and partnership cooperation of residents. The document adopted by the Krakow City Council in February 2018 presents a comprehensive vision of the city's development by 2030, taking into account various conditions: social, cultural, demographic and environmental.

The document diagnoses the challenges facing the city along with proposals for solutions and specifically planned areas of action.

One of the most important is **the improvement of the quality of the natural environment**, understood in particular as:

- Improving air quality
- adaptation to climate policy, in particular in terms of reducing pollutant emissions
- Increase energy efficiency
- preventing the effects of negative climate change
- Reduction of noise levels and electromagnetic field emissions.

In order to effectively respond to these challenges, Krakow wants to become a city that:

- optimizes energy consumption
- carries out activities for the protection and adaptation to climate change
- pursue policies to reduce pollutant emissions
- manages its own resources, guided by the principle of sustainable development
- uses infrastructure based on modern technologies

Currently, the authorities of Krakow are working on updating the Krakow Development Strategy to adapt it to new challenges, however, the greatest emphasis is focused on the new General Plan of Krakow in connection with the reform of the spatial planning system in Poland and on the planned construction of a new investment – the first metro line in Krakow.

Krakow is the cultural capital of Polish, the city with the largest number of preserved monuments with convenient road, rail and air transport connections, which translates into great interest of visitors and increased tourist traffic in the city and the entire Małopolska region. The annual increase in tourist traffic translates into both benefits and nuisances for the city's residents.

City of Kraków in 2024 presented the document: **Vision of Krakow 2030 with a perspective to 2050**. In the update of the current Krakow Development Strategy 2030, the time horizon of 2030 has been retained, but with a long-term perspective in selected areas – until 2050. The reason for leaving the basic horizon until 2030 is the very unstable political and economic situation characterizing the period of development of the ASRK. The uncertainty of the future concerns changes in the global political and economic order of the world, the reason for which is, for m.in, the war in Ukraine. Energy prices have risen dramatically, and high

inflation is observed in many countries, including Poland. On the other hand, it is worth realizing the impact of new technological solutions related to the spread of artificial intelligence, which creates new opportunities in the sphere of computerization and robotization, and at the same time affects changes in the labor market. At the same time, key climate change – related to human activity – forces long-term actions regarding the model of the functioning of the economy and consumption behaviour. The challenge of building a smart, environmentally friendly city is to promote social participation and expand public awareness of the civilizational challenges faced by Krakow residents.

2. THE ROLE AND IMPACT OF THE UNIVERSITY

2.1. Contribution to innovation

The Cracow University of Technology has an 80-year tradition of educating the country's engineering staff, persistent work on improving Polish scientific and technical thought, as well as modernity and openness to change – these are the greatest assets of the Cracow University of Technology. Thanks to them, the university – operating in such a competitive academic centre as Krakow – has gained a strong position and consolidated its brand, which is best described by the word reliability.

The Cracow University of Technology, as well as others research centres in Krakow, Poland and around the world, must adapt to the dynamically changing modern world – not only by constantly updating the didactic offer, but also by expanding scientific activities. Scientists of the Cracow University of Technology invariably in the prestigious TOP 2% ranking of the most cited in the world! The two most recent rankings of the most influential people in science, compiled on the basis of all scientific achievements and citations in 2024, were published by analysts from Stanford University and the Elsevier Publishing House. Compared to last year, the number of researchers at our university has increased in both rankings.

The ranking taking into account the entire scientific achievements included 20 scientists from the Cracow University of Technology (compared to 18 a year ago). The most frequently cited researchers from PK in the list are: Adam Głowacz, PhD, DSc, Eng., Prof. PK, Prof. Krzysztof Pielichowski (Department of Chemistry and Polymer Technology, Faculty of Chemical Engineering and Technology) and Prof. Dariusz Bogdał.

At the Cracow University of Technology, we create a friendly climate for innovation. Rapid changes taking place in the world require constant development, creation of innovative solutions and investment in new technologies. It is no longer possible to imagine running a business without constantly looking for new ways of functioning and implementing innovations, both at the production, organizational or commercial level. This is the goal – to search and then evaluate and promote innovators among companies from Małopolska – that the Technology Transfer Center of the Cracow University of Technology has set itself by organizing the "Innovator of Małopolska" competition since 2006.

The idea of this undertaking is: to promote innovation in business activity in the Małopolska Voivodeship, to support the development of companies by promoting enterprises implementing innovative solutions, to improve the image of the region and its companies by promoting good examples. The competition has been very popular from the beginning and has found no equal in the region. All previous editions have already been attended by 234

companies that are dynamically developing their business following the latest trends. The number of participants in the competition so far allows us to confirm the belief that the Małopolska Region is an important centre of innovative thought and a modern approach to running a business. The "Innovator of Małopolska" competition, by distinguishing good practices, wants to promote an innovative approach to business and at the same time create the image of our region as a place friendly to innovation and new technologies.

2.2. Contribution to labour market

In recent years, many new fields of study have appeared in the university's offer, the introduction of which not only corresponds to the needs of the market, but is also a clear attitude to important social issues

Currently, the university educates almost 12 thousand students in full-time and part-time first- and second-cycle studies, as well as doctoral and postgraduate studies. The educational offer of the University of Technology includes over 30 fields of study in Polish. In addition, some courses are also taught in English, and two courses in Ukrainian. Such a large selection means a variety of intellectual searches and solving ambitious tasks under the supervision of qualified scientific staff.

Cracow University of Technology is definitely one of the universities that respond to the challenges of the socio-economic environment.

2.3. Contribution to the transitions in the region (energy, digital, green)

Scientific centres around the world must adapt to the dynamically changing modern world – not only by constantly updating their teaching offer, but also by expanding their scientific activities. Cracow University of Technology is one of the universities that respond to the challenges related to energy transitions, the development of green infrastructure and digital transformation.

2.4 Contribution to social/economic development

Cracow University of Technology is definitely one of the universities that respond to the challenges of the socio-economic environment. This was the case *with the Clean Air Engineering* course, whose graduates will face the problem of air quality in Małopolska. On the other hand, the launch of studies conducted partly in Ukrainian in the fields of *construction* and *transport* is a response to the needs of the war-torn country of our neighbours.

Cracow University of Technology with Center for Technology Transfer supports the local entrepreneurship and Innovation CTT also focuses on **implementation of research results of Cracow University of Technology to the industry**. Our Center has an insight knowledge about the realities of the commercialization process, and thanks to active collaboration with entrepreneurs can clearly identify needs and technical and business expectations of the industry.

Many years of activity in the gap between science and business allowed us to develop a **suitable offer for both scientists and entrepreneurs**. Depending on the individual needs of the customer we inform, advise, train, support the transfer of technology, elaborate

technological innovation certificates, conduct technological audits, help to find foreign partners. We also provide professional support to entities, who wish to apply for international research and development programs funded by the European Commission. Most of our services are free of charge.

From the very beginning we have been trusted by more than **45,000 customers**, we have completed **100 transfers of technology**, we have issued **dozens of technological innovation certificates**, we have conducted **hundreds of technological audits**. Over the past few years, we have brought to conclusion **over 20 license** agreements for commercialization of research results generated at the Cracow University of Technology.

2.5. Contribution and role in the regional governance

The Cracow University of Technology is a university with rich scientific and research traditions, where the latest technologies, innovative technical solutions and outstanding architectural projects have been created for many years. For a number of years, university employees, cooperating with local and regional authorities as well as entrepreneurs, have been contributing to improving the implementation of research results into business practice.

Years of experience have allowed us to develop appropriate tools and methods of work, thanks to which we conduct information and training activities aimed at building commercialization awareness among scientists of our university. The knowledge-based economy makes knowledge a key capital determining both the development of the organization itself and the local and regional environment, local and regional development requires an interdisciplinary approach to creating innovations.

We advise on intellectual property law and negotiate cooperation agreements with the industry. Numerous scientists from the Cracow University of Technology participate in many important study and investment activities in the Małopolska region and the city of Krakow. Among others, a group of several people participates in the development of a strategy for the metro in Krakow.ⁱⁱ

2.6. Contribution to the overall well-being of the region

The Cracow University of Technology is a university with rich scientific and research traditions, where the latest technologies, innovative technical solutions and outstanding architectural projects have been created for many years. For a number of years, university employees, cooperating with local and regional authorities as well as entrepreneurs, have been contributing to improving the implementation of research results into business practice.

For several years, the Cracow University of Technology has been a co-organizer **of the** Małopolska Researchers' Night, which takes place as part of a pan-European undertaking promoting the role of scientists in the socio-economic development of our Voivodeship. On this special night, nearly 1000 people visit our university. The last Researchers' Night took place on 26.09.2025.

Last two FutureLab PK invites high school students to the #nauka4future event. It is a series of free popular science events organized by FutureLab Cracow University of Technology, addressed to students of secondary schools — especially those from the maturational classes. The plan of the event includes presentations, demonstrations, workshops and lectures conducted by scientists, students working at FutureLab PK and experts in various fields. The aim of #nauka4future is to bring closer modern technologies, the mechanisms of modern scientific research and the challenges posed by the 21st century in science and engineering.

2.7. Contribution to the broad prosperity of the region

Cooperation with regional and local authorities based on a partnership involving students, professors, researchers, representatives of the industry community, the aim of which is to identify needs and opportunities that will be used as challenges by Thematic Interest Groups (TIGs) leading to the creation of new academic offers or research projects.

3. Suggestions how the University can better align their research and training agendas (STARS EU priority areas) to fit regional needs and align to regional objectives and main policies

Permanent cooperation between the Cracow University of Technology and regional authorities focuses on strengthening the EU priorities and the strategy of the Małopolska region. As part of the developed theme **#PKStarsEuLivingLab**, the Cracow University of Technology includes the activities of the Cracow University of Technology to strengthen the role of the regional policy of Małopolska with specific actions aimed at improving national and regional research and innovation systems and activities to manage industrial transformation within the Smart Specializations of Małopolska. **#PKStarseuLivingLab**, as part of its comprehensive activities, will focus on creative **industries and leisure with special attention**.

In accordance with the Regional Innovation Strategy of the Małopolska Region 2030¹: Smart Specialization of the Region: **Creative and Leisure Industries** is a very broad domain combining four, relatively specific fields focused on:

1) **cultural industries** (film, audiovisual, music, publishing, fashion, media and advertising, performing arts), **architecture and conservation of works and monuments**,

2) **design (industrial design and graphic design**, but also more broadly understood design with the use of *user experience*, including, m.in, information structures, interactions) with particular emphasis on the furniture industry developed in the region,

3) **the video game industry and multimedia** and audiovisual tools serving creators and their recipients,

4) "premium tourism", combined with modern information and communication solutions, health, catering and educational services.

4. The process of making an updated or new RIS3 strategy for the European planning period 2028 – 2034 will start soon or is already started. Is the University a partner in this process and/or what are the possibilities for the University to give input to the new RIS3 strategy?

This is a challenge for the next future. Constant cooperation between the Cracow University of Technology and regional authorities focuses on RIS3 strategy as well as the need to update the strategy of development results from formal reasons and the need to take into account the changes that have taken place in recent years in the world and the work carried out by the government on new strategic documents, it is justified to conduct a re-analysis of the socio-economic situation.

G. University of La Laguna, Tenerife/Canarias

ULL is in the municipality of San Cristóbal de La Laguna, located in the north of Tenerife. La Laguna for short, is the historical and cultural capital of the island and part of the metropolitan area that includes the administrative capital, Santa Cruz de Tenerife, with a combined population of around 300.000 people. It is recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage City, combining academic vitality with a strong commitment to sustainable urban and regional development. The ULL, founded in 1792, is one of the key institutions driving the Canary Islands' innovation, education, and research ecosystem.

The regional context of the Canary Islands presents unique challenges and opportunities as an ultraperipheral region of the European Union. Economic diversification, digital transformation, green transition, and the consolidation of a sustainable tourism model are central to its future development. The University of La Laguna plays an essential role in addressing these priorities through applied research, talent development, and collaboration with public institutions and industry.

To prepare this report, discussions were held with representatives from the **Canary Islands Government (Gobierno de Canarias)**, the **Canary Islands Agency for Research, Innovation and the Information Society (ACIISI)**, and the **Tenerife Island Council (Cabildo Insular de Tenerife)**, complemented by desk research of strategic regional documents, including the **Canary Islands RIS3 Enlarged 2023–2027** and the **Science, Technology and Innovation Law under development**.

1. Suggestions for better alignment of the university with regional needs and objectives

1.1. Strengthen the link between academia and the regional innovation ecosystem

ULL should continue to serve as a hub connecting science, business, and government. Enhanced cooperation with ACIISI and Cabildo de Tenerife can accelerate the translation of research results into practical innovation, particularly in fields such as sustainable tourism, renewable energy, and health technologies. Joint innovation and living-lab models—already emerging in areas like biomedicine and environmental science—should be expanded.

1.2. Foster applied and entrepreneurial education

Developing dual or practice-oriented master's programmes in sectors identified in the RIS3—health and wellbeing, blue and green economy, digitalisation, and sustainable tourism—, which will add to the already existing ones such as Marine Biology or Bio conservation in islands, will strengthen graduates' employability. Embedding

entrepreneurship training and innovation projects into curricula could improve knowledge transfer and talent retention on the islands.

1.3. Internationalisation and talent attraction

As part of its strategy to counteract brain drain, ULL is encouraged to consolidate English-language programmes and increase joint degrees within STARS EU. This will help attract international students and researchers who can contribute to regional innovation and fill skill gaps in high-tech and research sectors.

1.4. Communication and social impact

ULL should enhance its visibility as a driver of societal change by showcasing success stories of university-industry collaboration and citizen science projects. Demonstrating measurable impact—on local health systems, environmental management, or tourism sustainability—will improve public perception and policy support.

2. Potential linkages with key developments in STARS EU

The University of La Laguna's strategic priorities are strongly aligned with STARS EU's Thematic Interest Groups (TIGs), particularly in **Healthy Ageing, Circular Economy, Energy Transition** and **Digital Transformation**. The university can leverage STARS EU as a platform to test living-lab methodologies, share best practices on inclusive innovation, and co-develop interregional projects on island resilience, circular economy, and digital skills. Ongoing collaborations with the regional health service (SCS) and BioAdvance Foundation already represent concrete examples of this alignment.

3. Role and impact of the university in relation to regional challenges and strategies

3.1. Contribution to innovation

ULL is a central actor in the Canary Islands' innovation system. It leads and participates in numerous R&D projects funded under the ERDF and Horizon Europe frameworks. Through the Technological and Scientific Park of Tenerife (PCTT), ULL supports entrepreneurship, incubation, and technology transfer, particularly in biotechnology, astrophysics, and ICT. These initiatives reinforce the implementation of the enlarged RIS3.

3.2. Contribution to the labour market

ULL is the main provider of high-skilled professionals in Tenerife and the wider archipelago. Its collaboration with the Cabildo through programmes co-funding industrial PhDs connects

graduates directly with private companies, enhancing innovation capacity and addressing skills shortages in R&D-intensive sectors.

3.3. Contribution to regional transitions

The university actively contributes to the ecological and digital transitions by advancing research in renewable energies, oceanography, and climate adaptation. Projects in sustainable tourism and biodiversity monitoring provide tools for balancing economic development with environmental protection—crucial for island ecosystems.

3.4. Contribution to social and economic development

Beyond its scientific role, ULL contributes to social cohesion through community outreach, cultural preservation, and lifelong learning programmes. Its focus on inclusive education and social innovation aligns with regional efforts to reduce inequality and promote well-being across the islands.

4. Strategic context

4.1. Canary Islands RIS3 Enlarged 2023–2027

The regional Smart Specialisation Strategy identifies five priority domains:

- 1. Health and Well-being**
- 2. Smart and Sustainable Tourism**
- 3. Digitalisation and Advanced Technologies**
- 4. Blue and Green Economy**
- 5. Creative and Cultural Industries**

ULL contributes significantly to all these areas through research clusters and strategic partnerships, particularly with the Canary Health Service, the Astrophysics Institute of Canary Islands (IAC), and tourism innovation networks.

4.2. Canary Islands Science, Technology and Innovation Law (draft 2025)

ULL is participating in consultations to design governance mechanisms and funding tools to implement the new law, aiming to improve coordination between universities, research centres, and regional authorities. This process offers a key opportunity for ULL to embed its priorities in long-term innovation policy.

4.3. Cabildo de Tenerife's Innovation Plan and New PhD Programme

Through co-funded doctoral positions and investment in aerospace innovation (e.g. microsatellite research), the Cabildo and ULL are fostering an emerging high-tech cluster in

the island. This strengthens regional self-sufficiency and contributes to EU objectives on digital sovereignty and sustainability.

5. Participation in future regional strategies (2028 – 2034)

ULL will be a leading partner in shaping the next RIS3 cycle for the Canary Islands. Building on its academic excellence and networks within STARS EU, it can coordinate stakeholder dialogue to ensure that scientific, educational, and innovation agendas reflect the specific needs of island territories. Emphasis should be placed on resilience, circular economy, and digital inclusion—areas where ULL has both experience and capacity to lead.

H. Silesian University in Opava, Czechia

Engagement with Regional Stakeholders and Policy Input

Context and Objectives

The Silesian University in Opava (SUO) has been actively involved in strengthening regional cooperation and aligning university initiatives with policy priorities under the STARS EU framework. This document summarises key insights from recent consultations with two major regional stakeholders – the Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC) and the District Chamber of Commerce in Opava (OHK Opava) – and outlines practical recommendations for the next phase of collaboration.

Stakeholder Consultations and Main Takeaways

Meeting with the Moravian-Silesian Innovation Centre (MSIC) – 23rd September 2025

The meeting with MSIC focused on reviewing cooperation over the previous year and exploring new opportunities for joint action. Both sides confirmed that the collaboration has been valuable, especially in mapping innovation capacities and engaging students and researchers in applied projects.

MSIC proposed the creation of a regular quarterly information update summarising SU's activities under STARS EU – including implemented and planned projects, opportunities for involvement, and outcomes with potential impact on regional development. This summary would help build awareness and strengthen information flow among stakeholders in the Moravian-Silesian innovation ecosystem.

The Innovation Centre also expressed interest in becoming more directly involved in the preparation and implementation of research and innovation projects. In particular, MSIC experts could contribute to pilot validation, SME engagement, and innovation transfer, enhancing the real-world impact of university-led initiatives.

Online Meeting with the District Chamber of Commerce in Opava – 25th September 2025

The second meeting presented SUO's planned initiatives such as the Erasmus+ HEInnovate project and the development of the Living Lab Opava. The Chamber Director highlighted the need to connect academic innovation more directly with business practice and to strengthen university participation in entrepreneurial activities across the Opava district.

As an outcome, OHK Opava will take an active role in shaping the Living Lab, serving as a liaison between SUO and the regional business community. Thematic priorities include healthy ageing and healthcare innovation, support for entrepreneurship and SMEs, the introduction of digital and modern technologies, and international traineeships focused on future competencies, taking into account the presence of international companies in the region (e.g., Mondelez).

The Chamber will help identify companies interested in pilot cooperation and represent the business sector in the Living Lab's steering structure.

Cross-cutting Insights

Both meetings confirmed that a more structured communication mechanism is needed to maintain continuous cooperation. Stakeholders value SUO's open and collaborative approach but expect clearer and more regular communication on current research activities and project outcomes. The proposed quarterly summary will therefore serve as a strategic coordination tool within the regional innovation ecosystem.

In addition, partners agreed that SUO's engagement in Living Lab development and applied research aligns with the regional transition priorities in health, digitalisation, and sustainable growth.

Strategic Role of SUO in Regional Development and RIS3

SUO is actively engaged in the creation of the new RIS3 strategy (2028–2034). The Rector of the Silesian University is a member of the working group of regional university rectors that influence the strategy's thematic orientation and priorities. The University also participates in working groups on entrepreneurship and digitalisation, contributing expertise to initiatives such as “Podnikavý region” (Entrepreneurial Region).

Furthermore, SUO is involved in a research project supported by the Technology Agency of the Czech Republic (TAČR) focusing on “Entrepreneurship 2.0” – exploring barriers and support mechanisms for individuals aged 40+ who start their first businesses. One of the project's key outcomes will feed directly into the new RIS3, shaping policy recommendations for inclusive entrepreneurship support.

Policy Directions and Next Steps

- Establishment of a quarterly information summary “STARS EU Moravian-Silesian Update” to enhance transparency, knowledge sharing, and opportunities for joint action.
- Formal inclusion of MSIC experts in SU research and innovation activities.
- Active role of District Chamber of Commerce of Opava in the design and governance of the Living Lab Opava.
- Strengthened connection between SU and regional strategic platforms.
- Continued engagement with regional businesses, municipalities, and public institutions in joint pilot projects and skills development.

University Impact in the Regional Context

The Silesian University in Opava is increasingly recognised as a key contributor to the Moravian-Silesian Region's transformation. It enhances innovation capacity through applied research, supports labour market adaptability by equipping students with digital and entrepreneurial skills, and contributes to social and economic resilience. The University's initiatives respond to transitions in health, energy, and green transformation, combining academic knowledge with regional needs.

SUO's involvement in governance structures and policy formulation ensures that academic expertise is directly reflected in regional strategies. Its projects and partnerships advance not only competitiveness and innovation but also the overall well-being and broad prosperity of the region.

I. University Marie and Louis Pasteur , Bourgogne Franche-Comte, France

Report on Bourgogne Franche-Comté public stakeholders expectations regarding future STARS EU developments

UMLP has organized a meeting with the public authorities of the region in June 2025. Most urban areas (« communautés d'agglomérations ») were represented, as well as the Region and the academic region (deconcentrated authority of the Ministry of Higher education and Research). At that occasion, the current and planned activities of the Alliance were presented, in particular : the STARS EU Traineeship programme, the Future lab camp (starting in March 2026 in North Franche-Comté) and the Living lab in Energy transition (starting in Autumn 2025). In addition, a survey was set up in September, focusing more particularly on current collaboration and expectations regarding green, digital and societal transitions and innovation

Outcomes and observations on the meeting with public authorities in June

Besides involving the regional stakeholders in the STARS EU activities, regular communication (no « communication » newsletter but regular follow up on meetings and joint activities) and closer connexion with the regional network of stakeholders involved in European projects and policies, coordinated by the Regional authority, will be the main steps for dissemination of future activities and create better understanding. Indeed, in spite of the fact that the university is located in six different campuses in the Region and that a large majority of its students are recruited in Bourgogne Franche-Comté and surrounding regions, there is only partial insight on the university's ongoing activities and their impact. The public authorities express a strong interest in faster, more flexible mechanisms for connecting their needs with the university's resources, particularly in relation to internships, thesis projects, and collaborative research. However, several challenges remain, especially for Alliance wide collaboration :

- The time path from idea to implementation of joint activities is considered as very long ;
- Academic freedom is a prerequisite for academics and students, whereas public authorities need to « control the outcome » (at least the public part) ;
- Language, and national regulations applicable for students from partner universities on internship in Bourgogne Franche-Comté, will be challenging as well.

There is a great interest in collaborative projects, such as internships, joint or applied research, knowledge development and innovation. However, it is very evident that not all public authorities are well prepared to the way how, and where, to express a need for collaboration with the university on skills and/or knowledge development. In that respect, alliance broad collaboration could be very challenging if not clearly thematically focused and benefitting the regional area. In addition, sustainability of the collaboration will depend on joint successes and continuous mutual efforts to enhance the local authorities' understanding of how the university and the alliance can contribute to regional transition.

Notwithstanding existing contacts at local level (with faculties and research units at one of the six campuses), it might be interesting to consider creating in the future a single central entry point at the university for questions and expressions of interest in academic-territorial collaboration in innovation and skills and knowledge development on project basis.

Outcomes of the survey

Three local authorities answered to the survey : Greater Belfort agglomeration, the consultative and coordinating body called « Pôle métropolitain Nord-Franche-Comté » (PMNFC) acting on behalf of both Belfort and Montbéliard agglomerations, and the consultative and coordinating body called « Pôle métropolitain Centre Franche-Comté » (PMCFC) acting on behalf of six agglomerations (of which Besançon is the most urban).

The Northern public bodies are very open to collaboration with academic stakeholders, with many collaborative projects running, in particular through the State funded programme « innovative territories », aiming at regenerating disused industrial sites in the area and creating a joint ecosystem for ecological, industrial, digital and societal innovation. The projects funded through this programme involve private (industries, start ups) and public stakeholders (universities, public housing agency, local authorities). Projects involving UMLP (Belfort) include the renovation of the campus, applied research in the hydrogen energy sector, and initiatives aiming to foster innovational mindsets and facilitate collaborations. PMNFC also mentions a collaboration (to come) in the field of environmental health. UMLP is currently setting up its STARS EU Living lab on the energy transition with active input from Belfort and Montbéliard, and organizing the Future lab camp 2025-2026 within this framework. Public authorities and other stakeholders from de STARS EU regions will be invited.

PMCFC's contribution highlights the interest of the territories for the dialogue initiated under STARS EU. The perception of the opportunities for collaboration with UMLP and moreover those offered through the alliance is still quite fragmented in the rural agglomerations, but very well identified in the Besançon urban area (Grand Besançon Métropole, GBM), who has adopted a local policy supporting initiatives and projects in the STARS EU priority areas. Indeed, these priorities correspond very well to the local needs. GBM is currently setting up the Lab of territorial innovation, targeting in particular the following territorial challenges : attractiveness, environmental, economic and social transitions, collective well-being, and social-territorial cohesion. The aim is to actively involve UMLP in this Lab, mainly in the fields of Humanities, Environmental sciences and health/healthcare.

Respondents suggest to jointly build a comprehensive, multidisciplinary approach of the energy transition (including, economic, legal and other fields). Furthermore it is stated that STARS EU could contribute, through concrete activities, to increasing the competitiveness and the international attractiveness of the area. New joint degrees, joint research & innovation activities fostering economic development would be clear indicators of STARS EU successes. According to PMNFC, applied research projects involving other STARS EU regional stakeholders would be a concrete way to start interregional collaboration. PMNFC furthermore suggests that STARS EU could foster early take-up of future societal challenges.

Annex 2 Methodology and example of Action Card

Introduction to the STARS EU Action Card Methodology

An emerging tool for regional co-creation and alignment under WP2 – RTA

1. Rationale and Purpose

The Action Card methodology will emerge as a structured, yet flexible tool designed to turn dialogue within the Alliance into coordinated and measurable action. It will allow each partner to translate its regional priorities and Smart Specialisation (RIS3) themes into concrete short-term initiatives, while keeping a clear link to STARS EU's long-term missions and European policy frameworks such as the Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs) and the New European Innovation Agenda (NEIA).

The Cards will serve three main functions:

- Alignment – connecting regional and thematic strengths to common STARS EU priority areas;
- Co-creation – encouraging shared ownership among universities, regional authorities, chambers of commerce, and innovation agencies;
- Visibility and learning – providing a transparent and replicable format for sharing pilot actions, partnerships, and outcomes across the Alliance.

2. Structure of an Action Card

Each Action Card will capture on a single page the who, what and how of a regional or interregional initiative.

Section	Content
Thematic scope & RIS3 alignment	Identifies the policy or innovation area addressed
Lead & contributing partners	Universities or regional actors responsible
Planned actions (6–12 months)	Concise description of activities to be implemented
Interregional linkages	Connections with other partners for replication or clustering
Funding & calls	Indicative programmes (ERDF, I3, Horizon Europe, IPA III etc.)
KPIs & monitoring	Key metrics tracked quarterly via Regional Gateways

3. Phased Development Process

The Action Cards will be developed through a series of iterative phases coordinated by the Regional Transition Accelerator (WP2):

1. Regional Intelligence Gathering – Each partner reviews regional innovation strategies, identifies RIS3 priorities, and consults key stakeholders.
2. Synthesis and Thematic Mapping – Findings are grouped into six shared thematic domains: Agro-Bioeconomy, Blue Economy, Creative Industries, Digital & AI, Energy Transition, and Healthy Ageing.
3. Partner Drafting & Peer Validation – Partners prepare their own Action Cards, peer-reviewed to ensure complementarity and cross-border synergies.
4. Integration & Alliance Alignment – The RTA team consolidates individual Cards into Thematic Action Cards, forming the foundation for Interregional Mission Clusters.
5. Continuous Feedback & Learning – Quarterly updates through Regional Gateways will maintain the Cards as living instruments, adaptable to new funding streams and regional needs.

4. Illustrative Examples

The first prototypes of Thematic Action Cards have been drafted under the themes:

- Agro-Bioeconomy
- Blue Economy
- Creative & Cultural Industries
- Digital & AI
- Energy Transition
- Healthy Ageing

These examples illustrate how the methodology will support cross-regional learning, stakeholder engagement, and the building of sustainable innovation value chains within STARS EU's priority area.

5. Next Steps

In the coming period, partners will test and refine the Action Card approach through selected pilot themes and training activities. The RTA team will facilitate these pilots, collect feedback, and prepare a guideline set for full deployment in the next STARS EU project cycle. In this way, the Action Cards will transition from an emerging concept to an operational instrument—bridging education, innovation, and regional policy co-creation across Europe.

Draft examples of Thematic Action Cards – Emerging Cooperation Paths

1. Agro-Bioeconomy

The *Agro-Bioeconomy* theme aims to stand at the heart of the STARS EU Alliance's mission to strengthen regional resilience, sustainability, and food security through innovation. Across the nine partner regions, agriculture, rural development, and circular resource use remain vital economic pillars and social anchors. Through this Action Card, the Alliance may transform scattered agri-food initiatives into a coordinated European mission linking rural innovation, circular materials, and sustainable gastronomy.

IPB (Portugal) and **UAMD (Albania)** may lead this cooperation, connecting Atlantic and Adriatic territories through Living Labs testing agro-tourism, circular packaging, and value-chain diversification. **SUO (Czech Republic)** could contribute expertise in circular bio-materials, while **HSB (Germany)** may strengthen agro-logistics and processing chains. **Hanze (Netherlands)** is expected to support data-driven food-quality solutions, and **ULL (Spain)** may enrich the cluster through island innovation in sustainable gastronomy and tourism.

Together, these partners aim to create a transnational ecosystem for sustainable food and bio-based innovation aligned with the *European Green Deal*, *Farm to Fork Strategy*, and *RIS3 2028–2034* priorities.

Next steps could include a shared **Agro-Bioeconomy Accelerator Programme**, **interregional staff exchanges**, and **pilot actions** under *Horizon Europe – Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment*.

In this way, the Action Card may demonstrate how STARS EU can turn regional knowledge and traditions into a European platform for sustainable food innovation and territorial cohesion.

2. Blue Economy

The *Blue Economy* theme seeks to connect sustainability, innovation, and territorial identity across the Alliance. Seas, coasts, and water resources will continue to provide both opportunity and responsibility for partner regions.

Through the Action Card process, partners may move from individual coastal projects toward a coordinated interregional agenda for sustainable blue growth, digital transformation, and coastal resilience. **UAMD (Albania)** and **IPB (Portugal)** could anchor this agenda in the Atlantic–Adriatic corridor, collaborating with SMEs and local authorities to pilot circular aquaculture, sustainable tourism, and port innovation. **Hanze (Netherlands)** and **HSB (Germany)** may bring advanced data-monitoring and maritime-logistics know-how, while **ULL**

(Spain) could integrate island innovation, marine energy, and tourism sustainability through cooperation with AC/ISI and the *Canary Islands Government*.

This constellation of expertise may enable the Alliance to act as a **distributed Blue Innovation Hub**, capable of testing technologies, scaling business models, and developing education programs across diverse regions. Future cooperation is expected to include joint projects under *Horizon Europe (Mission Ocean)*, *Interreg Atlantic/MED/MAC*, and *Regional Innovation Valleys (RIVs)*.

The Blue Economy Action Card thus envisions a strategic platform for Europe's coastal resilience, combining research excellence, stakeholder engagement, and education for sustainable maritime futures.

3. Creative & Cultural Industries

The *Creative and Cultural Industries (CCI)* theme reflects STARS EU's human-centred vision of innovation, connecting creativity, heritage, and digital transformation as drivers of sustainable growth. Across the Alliance, universities act as cultural catalysts—revitalising local economies, supporting creative entrepreneurship, and strengthening Europe's cultural diversity.

Through this Action Card, partners could unite diverse ecosystems—from **UAMD (Albania)**'s cultural-tourism initiatives and **UMLP (France)**'s design labs, to **SUO (Czech Republic)**'s creative-entrepreneurship models. **HSB (Germany)** may contribute digital storytelling expertise, while **ULL (Spain)** could bring island creativity through audiovisual industries, immersive tourism, and the *Smart Tourism Lab of Tenerife*.

Together, these initiatives aim to form a **Creative Industries Alliance Cluster** linking artistic innovation to social impact and regional identity. The cooperation aligns with the *New European Bauhaus*, the *European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century*, and *RIS3 2028–2034* domains on cultural innovation and place-based development.

Next steps may include **Creative Accelerator Labs**, expanded **student mobility** in arts entrepreneurship, and collaborative projects under *Creative Europe* and *Interreg MED/MAC*.

In this way, the CCI Action Card could transform local creative vitality into a cross-border platform for cultural innovation and social cohesion.

4. Digital & AI

The *Digital and Artificial Intelligence (AI)* theme is envisioned as the connective tissue of the Alliance—linking education, innovation, and governance across all nine partner regions. Digitalisation and AI are regarded not merely as technologies but as **enablers of systemic transformation** shaping the future of learning, health, mobility, and sustainability.

Hanze (Netherlands) and **HSB (Germany)** may contribute advanced capacity in data-driven research, smart governance, and digital entrepreneurship. **UMLP (France)** is expected to

provide GovTech applications for regional innovation management, while **SUO (Czech Republic)** could integrate AI tools into SME innovation programs. **UAMD (Albania)** and **IPB (Portugal)** aim to cooperate on SME digital transition and data literacy, ensuring inclusion of peripheral and rural regions. **ULL (Spain)** continues to strengthen applied digitalisation for tourism, health, and administration through *ACIISI* and the *Digital Innovation Hub of the Canary Islands*.

Together, these institutions may shape a **Distributed Digital & AI Mission Cluster**, demonstrating practical use cases—from AI-for-Health and AI-for-Governance pilots to micro-credentials in data ethics.

Their efforts align with the *Digital Europe Programme*, *Horizon Europe Cluster 4 – Digital, Industry and Space*, and the *European Data & AI Strategy*.

Next steps could involve a **Digital Skills Observatory**, interlinking regional *Digital Innovation Hubs*, and preparing joint applications for *Digital Europe 2026–2027* calls.

Through this cooperation, STARS EU aims to act as a **transnational driver of ethical, inclusive digital transformation**, ensuring technology serves people and regions.

5. Energy Transition

The *Energy Transition* theme captures the Alliance’s ambition to become a **laboratory for Europe’s green transformation**. Across partner regions, decarbonisation requires connecting applied research, industrial innovation, and social transition. Through this Action Card, universities aim to establish a shared framework for renewable-energy systems, circular-industry models, and skills for a carbon-neutral economy.

HSB (Germany) and **UMLP (France)** could lead a joint mission on hydrogen and circular mobility, linking Bremen’s port corridor with Bourgogne Franche-Comté’s industrial clusters. **University West (Sweden)** continues contributing expertise in *Work-Integrated Learning (WIL)* and energy engineering. **Hanze (Netherlands)** may share experience in regional energy-planning governance, while **ULL (Spain)** is expected to expand island-based energy solutions—microgrids, green hydrogen, and marine renewables—through partnerships with *ACIISI* and the *Canary Islands Energy Agency*. **UAMD (Albania)** and **IPB (Portugal)** may complement this with pilots on rural renewable systems and energy efficiency.

Together, these efforts aim to create a **Transnational Green Transition Cluster** aligning with the *European Green Deal*, *REPowerEU Plan*, and *Mission on Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities*, contributing to the goal of net-zero regional economies by 2050.

Next steps could include **Joint Hydrogen Transition Desks**, **challenge-based programmes** for students and SMEs, and **shared infrastructure roadmaps** linking local energy hubs to European funding streams (*ERDF*, *Horizon Europe*, *Interreg*).

Through these coordinated actions, STARS EU is expected to serve as a **Pan-European catalyst** for energy resilience and innovation, showing how regional collaboration can power a sustainable future.

6. Healthy Ageing

The *Healthy Ageing* theme expresses STARS EU's commitment to shaping a Europe that is not only innovative and green but also inclusive and caring. With ageing populations, workforce transitions, and increasing healthcare needs, the Alliance may position itself as a driver of innovation in health, wellbeing, and lifelong learning. Through this Action Card, universities aim to connect health technology, digital care, and social innovation into a shared European mission for wellbeing across life stages.

University West (Sweden) and **Silesian University in Opava (Czech Republic)** could co-lead this mission through future *Work-Integrated Learning* and *Healthy Ageing Living Labs*, linking education, healthcare providers, and authorities. **Hanze (Netherlands)** may extend this work via its *STARS Health Living Lab* on applied health innovation. **ULL (Spain)** is expected to continue telemedicine and digital-health pilots, while **UAMD (Albania)** contributes strong community engagement and public-health education. **UMLP (France)** and **HSB (Germany)** could provide expertise in social innovation, digital inclusion, and healthcare entrepreneurship.

Together, these partners may establish a **pan-European ecosystem** for Healthy Ageing and Skills for Care aligned with *Horizon Europe Cluster 1 – Health*, the *EU Care Strategy*, and *RIS3 2028–2034* priorities.

Next steps may involve **joint micro-credentials** for healthcare professionals, **interregional policy dialogues** on workforce adaptation, and **collaborative pilots** under *Horizon Europe* and *Interreg Health & Wellbeing* programs.

In this way, the Healthy Ageing Action Card could become a **beacon of human-centered innovation**, showing that STARS EU's social mission is as strong as its scientific one—and that caring for people remains integral to sustainable, resilient regions