The Aosta Valley’s Smart Specialization Strategy

In 2014, the regional government embarked on the opportunity to develop a “Smart Specialization Strategy (S3)” (Box) under an EU-funded programme that enables regions to identify their own competitive advantages [1]. Accordingly, Aosta’s resulting S3 proposes a long-term vision emphasizing the region’s mountains as a unique asset. It aims at strengthening sectors where the mountainous territory has clear competitive advantages and at promoting innovation and sustainable development in the valley, involving businesses, research centres and civil society [2]. It also seeks to enhance regional partnership and trans-regional cooperation (with neighbouring regions, including France) to overcome structural weaknesses and restrictions. It focuses on three interconnected specialization areas: “Smart Mountain”, “Excellent Mountain” and “Green Mountain” (Figure 1). The following specific technologies have been identified as enabling ingredients to develop the region as a “laboratory”:

- Innovative ICT tools to support manufacturing systems, tourism and environmental management, and to improve residents’ quality of life;

Smart Specialization Strategy (S3)

“Smart specialization” is a place-based approach to identify niche areas of competitive strength and to solve societal challenges. Conceived within the European Commission’s Cohesion Policy, the approach aims at fostering innovation partnerships and entrepreneurial discovery processes. It emphasizes greater coordination and better alignment of resources and strategies between private and public actors from different levels of governance. The development and implementation of a Smart Specialization Strategy (S3) is supported by the European Structural and Investment Funds and national/regional funding [5, 6].
Micro- and nano-electronics provide complementary components for smart ICT applications and offer opportunities for international cooperation among industries;

New biotechnologies trigger innovations in agri-food chains and enhance the management of ecosystems and biodiversity.

The valley’s S3 operational programme triggered public interventions of about €103 million between 2014 and 2020. It has also attracted additional support from other EU programmes, such as the European Regional Development Fund or the trans-regional innovation programme ALCOTRA [3]. The S3 programme has helped to support regional discourses and communication processes. It has also strengthened stakeholder consultation to develop an effective governance model that encourages investments in capacity building, technological development and diffusion of ICT-based solutions. Through these activities, it has stimulated user-oriented innovation, e.g. in the fields of energy efficiency, intelligent mobility, transport and territorial monitoring.

Through the S3 programme, the Aosta Valley is striving for progress on social and economic issues (Table 1). Issues of core concern that are monitored closely are increasing the level of research and development in the region as well as customer satisfaction and engagement of inhabitants. The regional authorities are highly committed and support local research institutions (“Centres of Excellence”), network building, involvement of intermediate bodies (e.g. associations representing manufacturing and service companies and the Chamber of Commerce), targeted communication actions and auditing activities. The S3 has also led to a diversification of the economy in the Aosta Valley.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Baseline 2013</th>
<th>Mid-term assessment 2017</th>
<th>Target 2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School dropout rate (%)</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least a Bachelor’s degree in science or technology (%)</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share of investment in research &amp; development (in % of regional GDP)</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.68 *)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value added of productive industry (% of regional GDP)</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Export rate (% of regional GDP)</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises with innovative products/processes (%)</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>28.3 *)</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprises with broadband access (%)</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>98.8 *)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References and further reading

Note: URLs were last checked on 23 September 2020.


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