

TAFTIE 2019 Annual Conference

Mission-oriented research & innovation: What does it mean for innovation agencies?

On 6 June 2019, 76 representatives of 30 national innovation agencies gathered at Bourglinster Castle (Luxembourg) for this year's TAFTIE Annual Conference. The event focused on mission-oriented research and innovation and what this relatively new approach means for innovation agencies.

Research and innovation can be powerful instruments to address major societal challenges. "We talk a lot about mission-driven research and innovation programmes, but they are not yet widely practiced," says Ian Cresswell, Head of International Affairs at Luxinnovation and TAFTIE chair in 2019. "However, as the EU has really taken up this new approach, it is important that national innovation agencies have an in-depth understanding and are able to adopt it in a not too distant future."

Targeting cross-sector challenges

The European Union is amongst the pioneers in implementing mission-oriented programmes. Its next framework programme, Horizon Europe, will focus on broad challenges in the fields of climate change, cancer, oceans, carbon neutrality and food. "Defining research and innovation programmes that target societal problems instead of market failures is a very fundamental change," said keynote speaker Professor Rainer Kattel, Deputy Director of the Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose of University College London.

He also highlighted the necessity for mobilising a broad range of stakeholders. "Addressing this type of societal issues is mainly a matter of changing people's behaviour," he said. "How do we move around? What types of food do we consume? What do we do with our plastic? This means that we need to find relevant ways of tapping into societal movements and engaging people in general, not just researchers and entrepreneurs."

Complex global challenges such as those addressed by Horizon Europe require cross-sector, cross-border and cross-policy solutions. Robbert Fisher, Managing Director of the Joint Institute for Innovation Policy, pointed out that programme managers need to have a holistic view that goes beyond individual project proposals and analyse how the different projects fit together and complement each other. The missions targeted have to be carefully formulated. "It is not about picking winners or winning technologies," Mr Fisher warned.

Key learnings from practitioners

Several TAFTIE members contributed with their experience of moving towards or working with mission-driven programmes to share the lessons learnt. The Research Council of Norway (RCN) is focusing on fostering a research and innovation system that produces excellent and relevant knowledge. This knowledge is used for addressing societal challenges and transitioning towards a more diversified economy. "We have made a real 'clean-up' of our organisation, schemes and processes," said Anne Kjersti Fahlvik, Executive Director of RCN. "We now have a portfolio approach to everything we do and make sure that we cover the whole spectrum, from basic research to entrepreneurs and the public sector, in each action."

Kentaro Morita, General Director of the Global Technology Research Unit of the Japanese organisation NEDO, explained how his organisation was created in the wake of the two major oil crises in the 1970 with the mission of finding ways to substitute oil with renewable energies. The mission-driven organisation pursues a bi-directional approach to define key technology fields and projects. Project themes derived from social needs are combined with topics identified through technology forecasting, backcasting done based on a vision of a desirable future society and international competitiveness analyses.

Further insights on working with mission-driven programmes at the national level were provided in a round table discussion. FFG Austria, SPIRIT Slovenia, RVO Netherlands, Luxinnovation and NRD Office Hungary shared good practice as well as challenges in this relatively new policy field. Conference participants took active part in the discussion by raising questions and answering live polls on current trends related to mission-oriented innovation and research in innovation agencies. A report summarising their feedback is presented in the annex.

Engaging the stakeholders

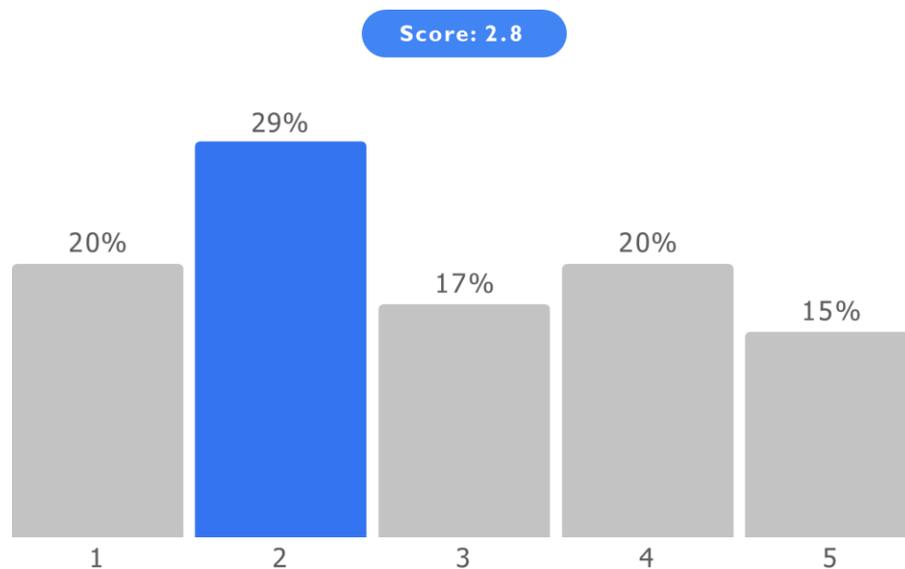
Alberto Bravo, Director, and Teo Firpo, Senior Researcher at the Innovation Growth Lab of Nesta, concluded the conference with a presentation on how policy experimentation can be used to implement mission-oriented research and innovation. They focused in particular on how more people can be engaged in selecting the missions and effective ways to bring together the key players and optimising the process.

Annex- Answers to the polls

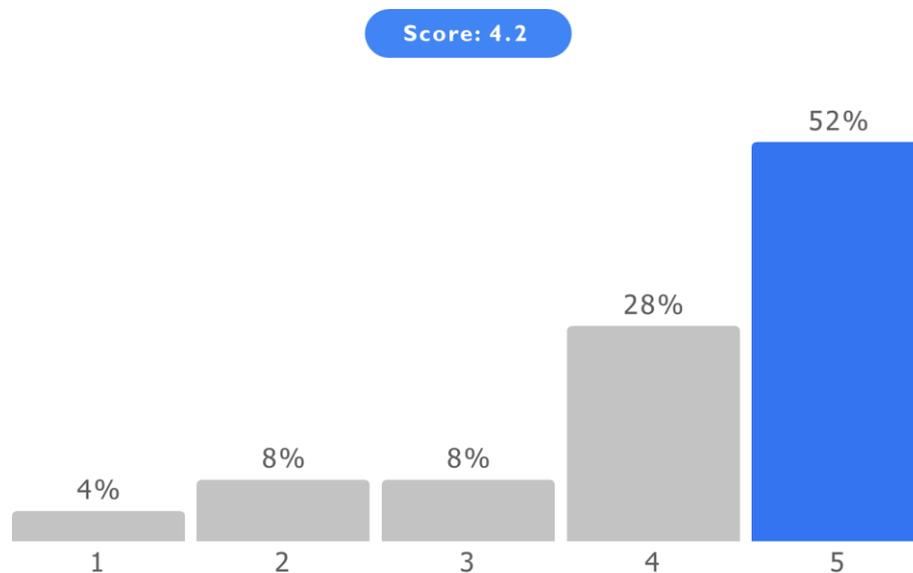
What methodologies do you use to evaluate mission oriented R&I?

- EU Regional Innovation Scoreboard
- Panel that knows innovation research as well as public sector and commercialisation. Pitching to ensure anchoring
- External jury's, In the near future: involvement of citizen in project evaluation (and follow up) "Sponsoring" by public sector, non-profit sector, etc.
- None yet...
- Innovation System analyse tools such as technological TIS and sector SIS Innovation system

To what extent is your Agency / Organization involved in mission-oriented research and innovation (today)? (41 answers)



To what extent should your Agency / Organization be involved in mission-oriented research and innovation in the future? (25 answers)



Should regional/national innovation agencies align their work towards the mission areas that will be chosen by the EU? (27 answers)

Yes, the required scale and diversity of ideas can only be achieved at the level of the European Union.

15 %

Yes, but agencies may also identify additional missions that can be of relevance at the regional/national level.

59 %

No, but agencies having similar missions shall cooperate.

15 %

No, missions result from a local process implying multiple stakeholders and can be implemented more effectively at regional/country level.

4 %

Not sure yet

7 %

How could your Agency / Organization become more mission-oriented? (23 answers)

Better understanding what mission-orientation means in practice



Identify adequate ways to define relevant missions



Adapt or redefine activities of the Agency / Organization taking missions into account



Find a way to integrate mission-driven activities in the existing business of the Agency / Organization



Train staff with regards to mission-orientation



Identify financial means to implement missions



Align missions at different levels: regional / national / EU

