



# **CLUSSPORT STRATEGY** **COMMON OBJECTIVES AND VISION FOR 2023** **IN THE FIELD OF SPORTS INNOVATION**

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# Content

<b>Forewords</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Sports &amp; Vitality in the framework of European collaboration</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1. Introduction	4
1.2. ClusSport supporting regional engagement in the sports sector	6
1.3. Complementary competences lay foundation for the collaboration	7
<b>2. ClusSport – Forerunner in the smart and sustainable sports development</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1. Common objectives and vision for 2023	9
2.2. Thematic areas show the direction to the ClusSport collaboration	10
2.3. Smart Innovation Hubs for Sports and Vitality lay foundation for the ClusSport collaboration	11
2.4. Common priorities in the ClusSport strategy	12
2.4.1. Priority one: Data Generation	13
2.4.2. Priority two: Research, Development & Innovation (RDI) for societal, economical and sports impact	13
2.4.3. Priority three: Venturing	14
2.4.4. Priority four: Education	15
<b>3. Governance</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1. Membership	16
3.2. Values	16
3.3. Roles and responsibilities	17
<b>4. From strategy to active implementation</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Contact details of leading regions</b>	<b>20</b>



# Interregional partnership for Smart Specialisation on **SPORT**



## Leaders

Led by **Lapland (FI)**, and **South Netherlands (NL)**, the partnership engages the participation of

## 12 REGIONS

The main objective of the partnership is to coordinate efforts among interested regions to develop investment projects that foster innovation in this sector. The thematic pillars for collaboration have been set as the following: Smart Sport Wearables; Smart Sport environment and IoT; and Healthy Active Lifestyle.



## Reference topics

### 1 Sport & physical activity is virtuous for individuals & individuals' emotions

To increase the level of physical activity of individuals is a complex issue, which involves aspects such as: activity, knowledge, social, non-cognitive and life skills, sportsmanship, time management, commitment, self-control and persistence, initiative and leadership.

### 2 Sport & Physical activity is virtuous for individual's health

Sport gives improved physical and health conditions for people; preventing injury or providing successful treatment for several diseases caused by sedentary lifestyles.

### 3 Sport & physical activity is virtuous for societies

Sport supports the creation of vital societies: through better social integration, decrease of costs of health and social care, strengthening of social networks and positive relationships, social inclusion and acceptance, building trust, gender equality etc.

### 4 Sport & physical activity is virtuous for European economies

There is a clear link between sport and physical activity and improvement of economic performance. Physical activity can lead to increases in income, job access and productivity, as well as reduction in health care costs and absenteeism.

### 5 Sport has virtuous spill over effects for a great variety of industrial sectors

Sport can influence associated domains like: tourism, transport, building & construction, environment, education and urban planning.



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## FOREWORDS

In Lapland region sports play a significant role from the perspective of health and wellbeing. Sports and active lifestyle increase both physical and social wellbeing and help prevent health problems and social exclusion among others. Our nature offers us 100 000 km<sup>2</sup> area for sports and recreation and our over 350 sport clubs offer free-time activities for all needs. At the same time, we are one of Finland's strongest competence centres for competitive sports and coaching.

From economic perspective, a major enabler for sports is tourism. Lapland is one of the fastest growing tourist areas in Europe with over 6 million annual overnight stays. With covid-19 forcing us to rethink tourism, sports, especially outdoor sports, has risen to a key role. With the pandemic situation changing our daily lives, digital solutions and new technologies have also increased their significance. We see digital solutions as a way to offer wellbeing services equally to all, despite our sparse population and long distances. They also offer great potential for new growth. There is a new opportunity to see sports more strongly as a platform for growth and new sustainable business.

We firmly believe in European collaboration and we want to be constructive forerunners. In this, ClusSport collaboration plays an important role. We have already achieved a lot together with our partner regions. Covid-19 recovery is further increasing the importance of collaboration. We all need to rethink our actions to succeed in this new situation and to create new sustainable business and in this, sport can offer fruitful platform for growth.

Mika Riipi  
County Governor of Lapland

## SUMMARY

Sports has great societal benefits and play a key role in both physical and mental wellbeing. Sports and physical activity play an important role in preventing health problems and supporting recovery. Physical inactivity is the fourth leading risk factor for diseases and it is a challenge in all age groups. Covid-19 has once again clearly shown that working on a healthy active lifestyle is a key asset in the care for health for all ages and groups. However, transferring to a healthier lifestyle is often easier said than done.

In addition, sport is identified as driver for economic growth. Sport & Vitality sectors have great potential and its links to other sectors such as tourism, health, and transport create new opportunities. New technologies and digital solutions play a key role in the future of Sport & Vitality and include unleashed potential.

ClusSport, running the The Sport & Vitality partnership on S3P Platform<sup>1</sup>, brings together European regions with the shared aim to find practises that stimulate active lifestyle to turn healthcare to proactive care for health and to support growth and new work possibilities in the field of Sport & Vitality. All ClusSport regions aim at boosting sport and vitality sectors in their regional economies and on European level. The partnership also brings together a large variety of stakeholders from the sport sector and related industries. ClusSport is embedded in and actively supported by the European Platform for Sport Innovation (EPSI).

ClusSport partners are developing joint activities in three thematic areas:

- ⇒ Smart Sport Wearables (quantified self) – ICT4Self
- ⇒ Smart Sport environment and IoT (quantified environment) – ICT4Env
- ⇒ Healthy active lifestyle – Sport4Vitality

This strategy guides the work of the consortium in the coming years. One main aim is the development of smart *regional innovation hubs for sports and vitality*. These innovation hubs are local ecosystems that support the transfer of technology and knowledge for use into the society and the industry to fulfil the market need and have economical, societal and sports impact. The hubs include living lab structures in real life settings to test and validate concepts while generating data through smart environments and soft technology.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sport>

# 1. SPORTS & VITALITY IN THE FRAMEWORK OF EUROPEAN COLLABORATION

## 1.1. Introduction

According to a study conducted by the European Commission<sup>2</sup>, the sports sector<sup>3</sup> demonstrates an impressive growth performance and has proved to have cumulative economic impact to many other economic sectors. Research results indicated that direct effects of sports sector, combined with its multiplier effects (indirect and includes), add up to 279.7 billion euro or 2,12% of overall GDP in the European Union. When summing direct and indirect effect, sports represents 5.67 million persons or 2.72% of the total employment in EU.

But the impact of sports has shown that it goes beyond the sports in the narrow sense as it is also an area for innovation and new business. The importance of sports and vitality to tackle the big societal challenge of inactivity and increasing health costs has been shown in multiple studies, where the economic and social return on investment is undisputedly clear.

Sports is also a sector for new business (start-ups) with crossovers to other business areas such as tourism, health and transport. Today the sports industry, and more widely the sports ecosystem, can be seen as an emerging industry providing real potential for new entrepreneurship and businesses.

Sports and physical activities are in the core of healthy lifestyle, but they can also have a positive impact on society. Countries that invest in sports have proven to increase their population's income, employment, social inclusion and productivity, and are reducing their expenses in health care system.<sup>4</sup>

EU has recognised the interdisciplinary role of sports on multiple occasions. In 2014 and 2018 the Council of Ministers addressed the *Economic dimensions of Sports and its Socio-Economic Benefit*. As a result sport was added to the Treaty of Lisbon's as a specific topic and budget multiplication under the Erasmus+ et al. initiative. *Tartu Call for a Healthy Lifestyle* emphasises the cooperation of different sectors such as technology, health, and

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<sup>2</sup> <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/865ef44c-5ca1-11e8-ab41-01aa75ed71a1/language-en/format-PDF/source-71256399>

<sup>3</sup> As the sports sector we here define the broader area of sports and physical activity. In the document it is often referred to as Sports & Vitality

<sup>4</sup> Several studies show a positive effect of investments in sports and vitality in terms of Social Return on Investment (SROI) and Economical Return on Investment (EROI), a.o.:

- SROI guide: <http://www.socialvalueuk.org/resources/sroi-guide/>,
- New Economy Social Value: [https://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk/files/5213/4996/6941/Social\\_Value\\_-\\_080612.pdf](https://www.socialauditnetwork.org.uk/files/5213/4996/6941/Social_Value_-_080612.pdf),
- Larissa E. Davies, Peter Taylor, Girish Ramchandani & Elizabeth Christy (2019): Social return on investment (SROI) in sport: a model for measuring the value of participation in England, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, DOI: 10.1080/19406940.2019.1596967



nutrition with the common goal of promoting and raising awareness of the benefits of healthy lifestyles where sports plays a significant role.<sup>5</sup>

The EU's Green Deal is the common target of the member states and EU-regions to develop sustainable practices and a better EU for the future. The sports sector takes this as its starting point, by developing economically and environmentally sustainable business activities in the field of sport – in close cooperation with partner organizations and enterprises. The implementation of the Green Deal in the sector is based on regional smart specialization and correspondence between regional and European activities.

Collaboration in the field of sports is supported by different initiatives in the EU, such as *Erasmus+ Sports* and *COSME European Cluster Collaboration Platform* supporting calls, which have resulted in different collaboration forums and networks. One of these is *EPSI, European Platform for Sports Innovation*,<sup>6</sup> which is a membership-based networking organisation within Europe gathering both private and public stakeholders and focuses on innovation in the areas of sports related physical activity, leisure and health. EPSI strives for a more innovation-friendly environment for the EU sports ecosystem, in order to stimulate innovation and to set up businesses with a focus on innovative technology.

Another recent development is the *SHARE Initiative*<sup>7</sup> supported by the European Commission and aiming to raise awareness of the role of sports and physical activity in the context regional development. The main objective is to empower stakeholders to unlock the full potential of sports for economic and social development across European territories by strengthening their inclusion in policy platforms dealing with regional development. It has produced several papers<sup>8</sup> highlighting the important contribution that sports and physical activity can make.

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has affected the EU and its Member States in a sudden and dramatic manner with an unprecedented impact on the health and daily life of European citizens. In addition to its disastrous short and mid-term health impact (including inactivity, mental health risks linked to loneliness and anxiety), the pandemic will also have extraordinary long-term consequences on people's daily lives, health, and generally on societies and many sectors of the economy, especially service sectors, e.g. tourism, food and accommodation services, transportation, and – sport.

These unique circumstances, beyond all the harm and sadness they bring, are also an opportunity to innovate, to rethink policies and to reassess priorities in the long run. The present-day crisis urges us to address priorities linked to health, resilience to disease and physical fitness. Sport and physical activity contribute to making societies and EU citizens more resilient. In the middle of a pandemic, the contribution of sport to

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<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/sport/sites/sport/files/ewos-tartu-call\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/sport/sites/sport/files/ewos-tartu-call_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://epsi.eu/>

<sup>7</sup> SportHub: Alliance for Regional Development in Europe, [https://ec.europa.eu/sport/share-initiative\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/sport/share-initiative_en)

<sup>8</sup> <https://keanet.eu/projects/>

preventive health care becomes increasingly important. Stopping the spread of COVID-19 may cause unprecedented changes to daily routines but ensuring the health and wellbeing of EU citizens through it all remains of the utmost priority. That's why investing in sport and health-enhancing physical activity is more important than ever. In order to achieve a sustainable, healthy Europe, sport and physical activity must be brought into the heart of all policies.

This document is based on a decision between the ClusSport partners to combine resources to create common strategy that will guide the work of the thematic partnership next years. Three main aspects of the shared objective can be summarised as:

- ⇒ Reinforce regional innovation capacity to boost clusters and facilitate investments;
- ⇒ Share knowledge between organisations to increase economic growth and job creation;
- ⇒ Identify joint-demonstration opportunities to link regional expertise with industry needs.

## 1.2. ClusSport supporting regional engagement in the sports sector

In 2017 Lapland and South-Netherlands, together with EPSI, decided to invite interested regions and regional actors to propose a thematic area under the *Smart Specialisation Platform for Industrial Modernisation*. Aim of the proposal was to support the recognition of sports as a growing industry sector. This led to the establishment of the ClusSport consortium and a joint proposal to launch the Sports thematic partnership. This document is based on a decision between the ClusSport partners to create a common strategy that will guide the work of the thematic partnership in the coming years.

Today, the ClusSport consortium is running the *Sports & vitality* thematic area in the *S3 Platform*<sup>9</sup>. Combining Smart Specialisation strategies and Cluster policies is at the heart of ClusSport, which aims to develop a pipeline of public-private investment projects to boost regional economic growth and employment.

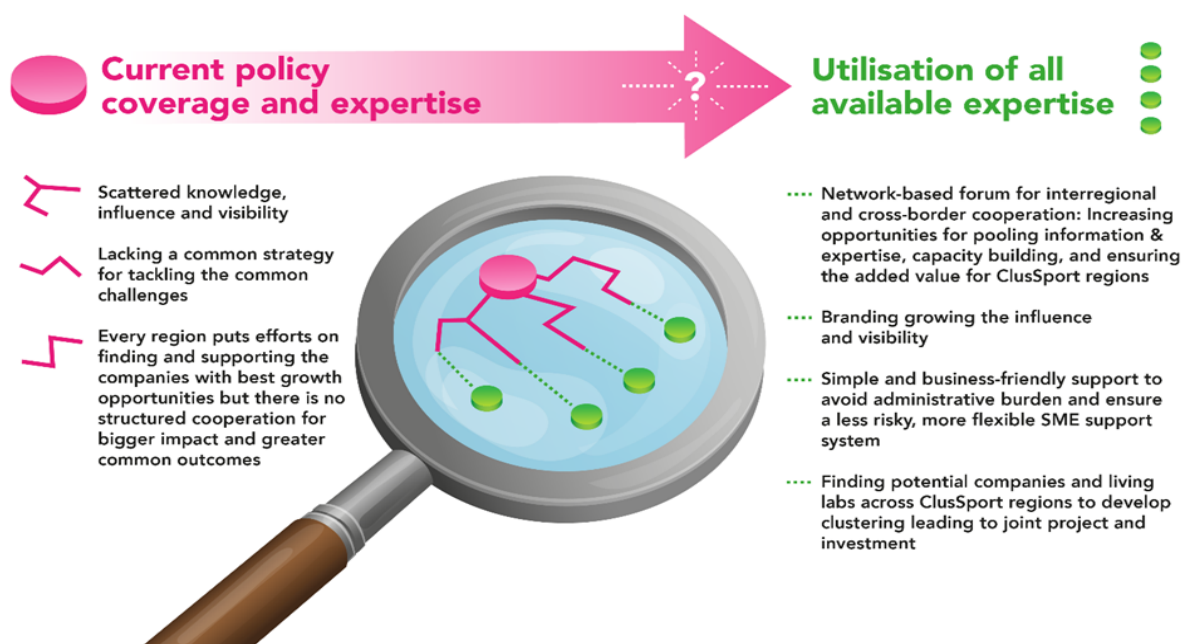
ClusSport, which is now a working group of EPSI, brings together regional authorities, clusters as well as actors from the field of research, education, innovation and technology. The collaboration is based on complementary competencies creating fruitful breeding ground for generating joint initiatives and co-investment projects in the field of sports and vitality.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/sport>



ClusSport wants to lead the way in connecting different regions and stakeholders that are actively participating in the development of both sports ecosystems and sports industry as such, and in creating strong sports initiatives under the European Union policy framework and funding schemes. ClusSport aims to combine capabilities, exploit complementarities and synergies, with the goal of creating critical mass and developing new grounds for innovation to be spread across sports markets and connected value



Picture 1 ClusSport brings together regions to channel excellences and synergies into fruitful collaboration

chains. The opportunities to engage in strategic interregional partnerships are very clear: from complementing competences and sharing infrastructures to developing joint investment projects, the regions in the partnership can propel each other mutually.

### 1.3. Complementary competences lay foundation for the collaboration

To support the emergence of interregional collaborative innovation projects in the sports sector, ClusSport has, with the support of ReConfirm<sup>10</sup>, mapped out assets, fields of expertise and future projects related to sports innovation in all partner regions. This mapping has highlighted initial regional excellences as well as synergies between regions that can be channelled into potential cooperation projects.

The animation of the network through a series of workshops and meetings, inspired and concretely carried out by the partnership, creates a pipeline of interregional co-investment projects that support the modernisation of sports and related businesses in the EU. Given the amplitude of sports and physical activities impacts on society, the regions in the partnership will meet the needs of the sector by segmented categories according to their strengths on each excellence. In order to achieve its goals, ClusSport

<sup>10</sup> <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/reconfirm>

has worked intensely to create regional smart innovation hubs for sports & vitality<sup>11</sup>. Those are local innovation ecosystems based on regional excellence with quadruple helix stakeholders.

## ClusSport partners and their regional excellences

<b>Lapland (FI)</b>	✓	Sustainability, arctic expertise, education, tourism
<b>South Netherlands (NL)</b>	✓	Smart, digital, technology, design, vitality, performance
<b>Flanders (BE)</b>	✓	Smart, specialised manufacturing
<b>Kainuu (FI)</b>	✓	Health & well-being, technology (games, simulators, data-based exercise), tourism
<b>Upper Austria (AT)</b>	✓	Tourism, mobility, health, and aging society
<b>Valencia (ES)</b>	✓	Digital, vitality, tourism & quality of life
<b>Catalonia (ES)</b>	✓	Products, tourism, facilities
<b>Auvergne Rhône-Alpes (FR)</b>	✓	Digital, tourism & outdoor, products
<b>Dalarna (SE)</b>	✓	Health & welfare
<b>Trento (IT)</b>	✓	Tourism, digital, quality of life
<b>Debrecen (HU)</b>	✓	Facilities
<b>Emilia Romagna (IT)</b>	✓	Tourism, health & life quality, culture and creativity



<sup>11</sup> See chapter 2.3.

## 2. CLUSSPORT – FORERUNNER IN THE SMART AND SUSTAINABLE SPORTS DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1. Common objectives and vision for 2023

The common strategy shows the way and encourages the sports sector players in the ClusSport regions to a stronger European collaboration so as to support sustainable growth and innovation in the field of sports&vitality and to make the European sports industry a global forerunner. The partners are working together to build strong and attractive operating environments for businesses where regional and interregional value chains in the field of sports are developed. Transparency and partnership encourage regional players to find innovative solutions and make choices by crossing traditional borders. The overarching unifying goals of ClusSport support the European objectives of:

- ⇒ protecting citizens and freedoms
- ⇒ developing a strong and vibrant economic base
- ⇒ building a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe
- ⇒ promoting European interests and values on the global stage

#### Vision

ClusSport is committed to give a societal and economic advantage to the EU and its participating regions by generating sustainable innovation and investment projects in the field of sports and related industries.

#### Operational plan

ClusSport is supporting regions and regional sports sector players to strengthen interregional collaboration and build industrial value chains, introduce the new joint projects and to promote the sports sector in the European context.

#### Starting points

Through EPSI there is a strong platform for partners to operate. Inclusive and transparent processes create added value for sports related innovation actions.

#### Values

The values of ClusSport collaboration are transparency, trust, passion, commitment, excellence and result orientation for innovation for sports & vitality.

As a means for this, the ClusSport consortium is focusing on the development of smart regional innovation hubs for sports and vitality. These innovation hubs are local ecosystems that support the transfer of technology and knowledge for use into the society and the industry. The hubs include living lab structures in real life settings to test

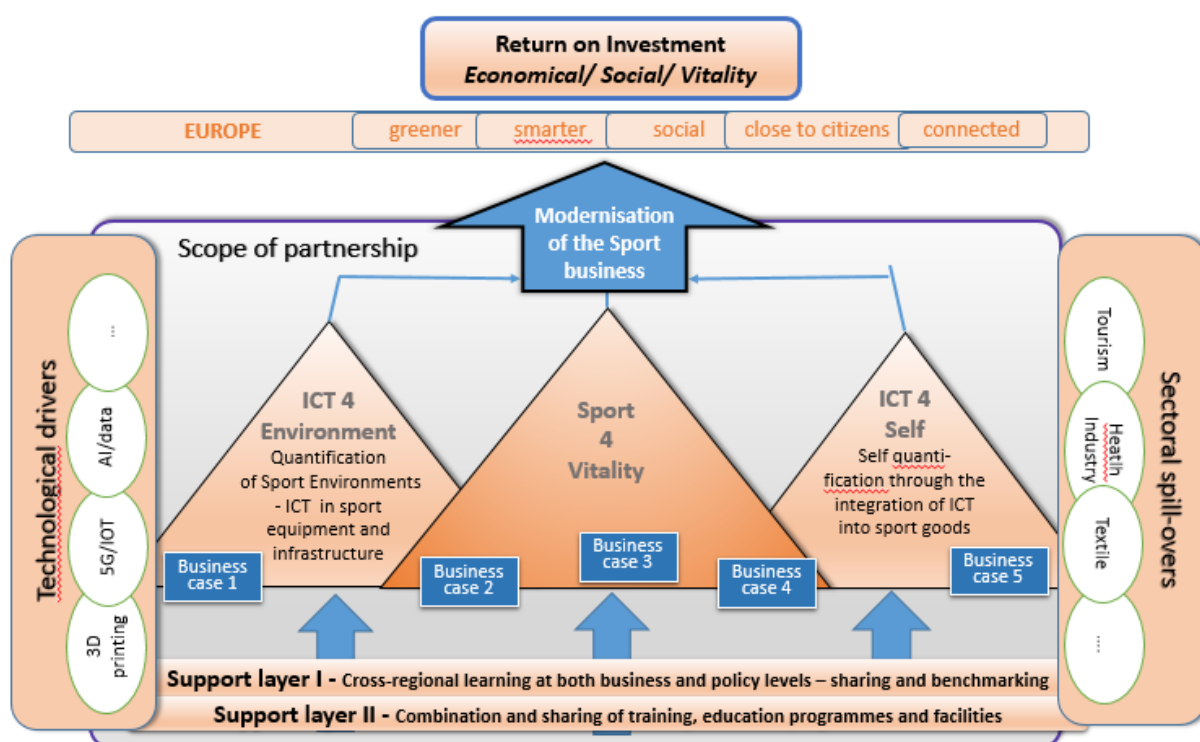
and validate concepts while generating data through smart environments and soft technology.

This entails building networks and programmes to support business development ideas, facilitate public-private partnerships, and encourage citizens to engage in physical activity. Based on their excellence and experience, each region will develop a specialised innovation hub that will be networked together in a complementary manner.

## 2.2. Thematic areas show the direction to the ClusSport collaboration

In its actions the ClusSport consortium is focusing on three thematic areas, which are clearly interlinked:

- ✓ **Smart Sports Wearables (quantified self) - ICT4Self:** modern ICT-embedded sporting goods testing in regional environments and in different contexts. In order to create feedback loops, a living lab allows the deployment of ICT-embedded sports wearables, allowing product to service improvement.
- ✓ **Smart Sports environment and IoT (quantified environment) - ICT4Env:** sports performances monitoring, sports service providers feedback, and new approaches testing to training, fitness, and others. It allows providing instant feedback based on sports performance monitoring and measuring.
- ✓ **Healthy active lifestyle - Sports4Vitality:** healthy sports practices monitoring to mobilise sporting goods and services that bring vitality through business development. The goal is to encourage sportive activities even after sportsmen have already achieved a final objective.



Picture 2 ClusSport thematic areas

### 2.3. Smart Innovation Hubs for Sports and Vitality lay foundation for the ClusSport collaboration

In order to achieve its goals ClusSport wants to operate through the regional *Smart Innovation Hubs for Sports and Vitality* and strengthen them as local sports innovation ecosystems. This is also supported by the EPSI collaboration. The innovation hubs operate according to the quadruple helix innovation model to create good conditions and opportunities for an interactive process involving actors from different domains. They support the maturation and the transfer of cutting-edge technology and knowledge with practical applications.

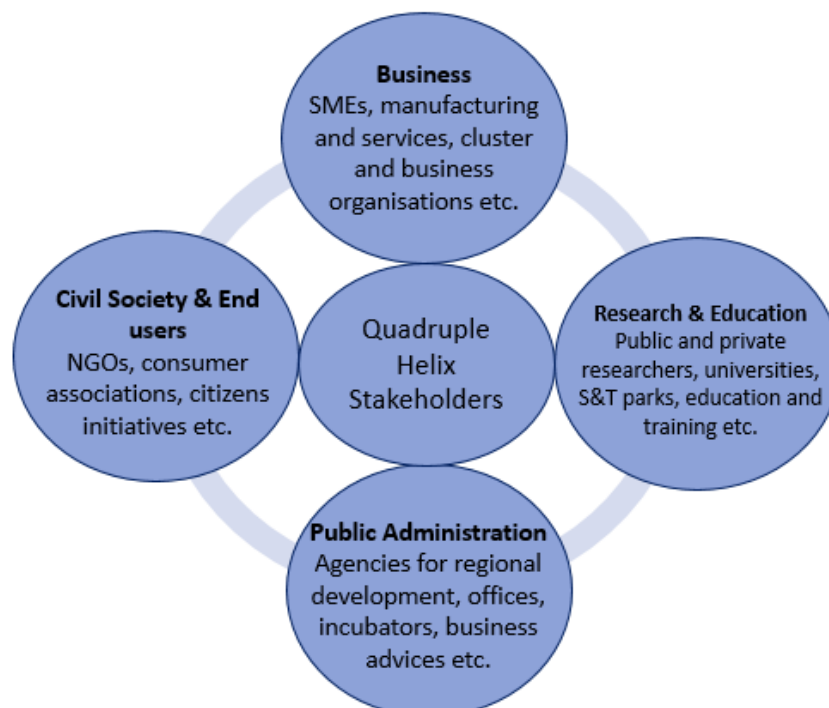
The main functions for the Smart Innovation Hubs for Sports and Vitality are:

**Excellence achievement:** focus on maturation and development of upcoming and highly innovative key enabling technologies for sports and vitality.

**Knowledge transfer:** tangible knowledge and sharing of intellectual properties for the benefit of innovation creation and SMEs' growth.

**Technology transfer:** transfer and uptake of existing and commercially available technology. Special attention will be given to SMEs' access to technologies, innovation capacity development and business transformation, as well as new competitive products spur, and time-to-market acceleration, with the objective of boosting their competitiveness and their social, societal and economic impact.

**Versatile collaboration:** horizontal cooperation between hubs about common issues to strengthen the innovation structure. Vertical cooperation via hubs consortia to tackle innovation projects and to achieve societal and economic impact. Transversal cooperation with other economic sectors.



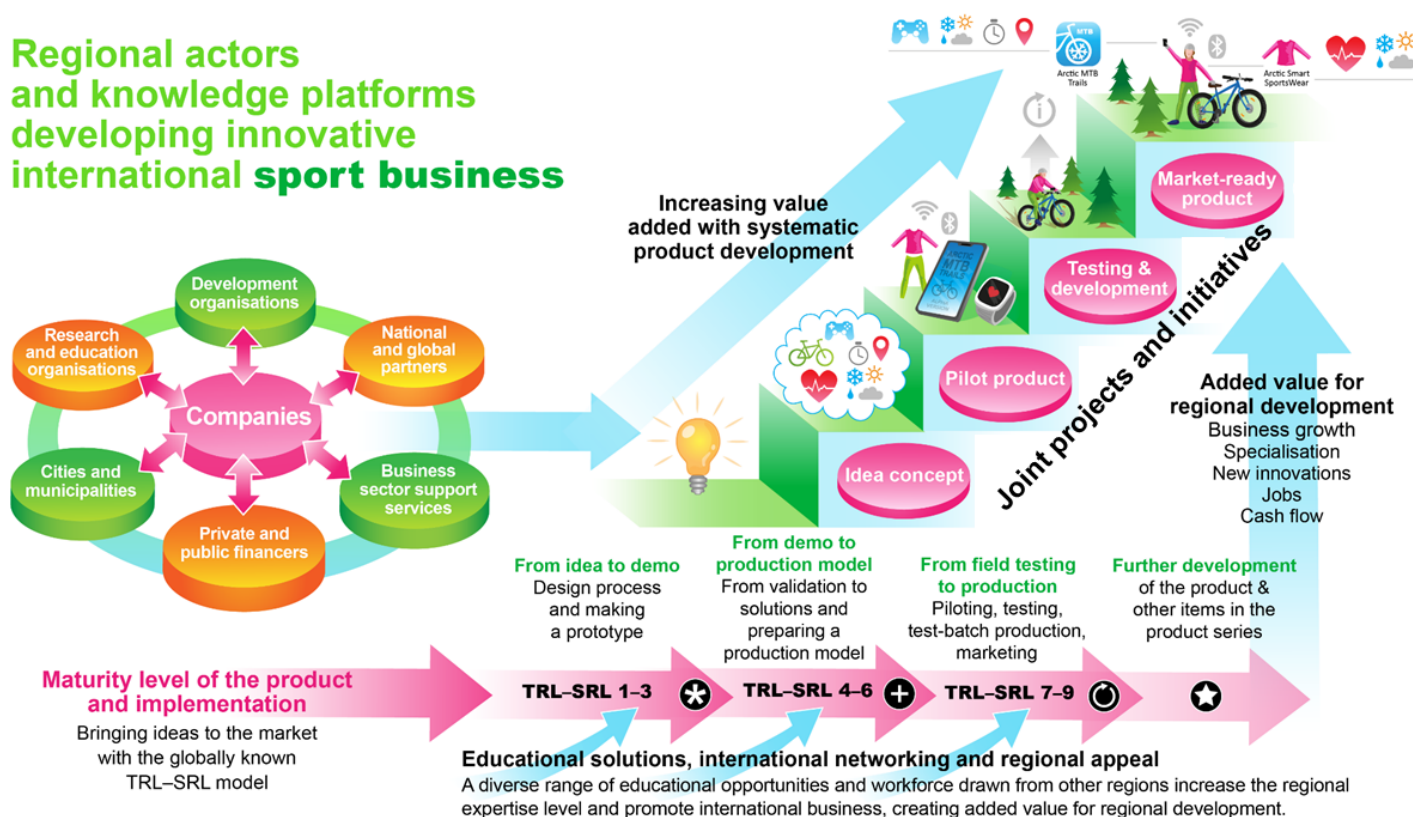
Picture 3 Quadruple helix innovation model

## 2.4. Common priorities in the ClusSport strategy

The main objective of the ClusSport strategic collaboration is to support partnering regions within the EPSI community inclusive of all their other stakeholders to develop a strong and competitive sports sector. Sports is seen by the European Commission as an emerging industry contributing strongly to the regional economic growth and providing new jobs.

A systematic and strategic approach will provide the ground for new innovation development. However, it is crucial to make sure that regional capacity building takes place in a coordinated manner and all partners are committed to a comprehensive development and are willing to apply practical deliverables demonstrating the TRL/SRL<sup>12</sup> scales.

### Regional actors and knowledge platforms developing innovative international sport business



Picture 4 TRL/SRL scales provides the foundation for the regional capacity building and interregional collaboration.

To make this all happen the regional Smart Innovation Hubs are of great importance for achieving regional and interregional co-investment projects because they serve to crossroad where the co-funding between regions and different stakeholders, both private and public, takes place. The hubs identify and assess regional innovation initiatives and share them in the interregional network to find the required excellences and create critical mass. Therefore, they need a number of innovative initiatives to foster such collaborations and follow the 4 common priorities of the ClusSport strategy.

<sup>12</sup> Technology/Service Readiness Level



### 2.4.1. Priority one: Data Generation

Data is critical to sports innovation: many innovations in sports enable data creation through wearable technologies and connected IOT infrastructures. Retrieving and treating this data is key to innovate, as it enables to measure the benefits of products and services and refine the analysis of athletes' results. Having a network of data generators across Europe is a key asset to expand the testing sample and to help companies to create better products and services whilst reaching out to a larger market. The network of innovation hubs must offer the infrastructures, knowledge and products to generate, store, transform, share, use, and exploit data for a variety of services and to different clients. ClusSport makes it possible by mapping and connecting these actors.

**Objectives and indicators of the collaboration area** - ClusSport within the overarching EPSI network aims at defining, mapping and completing the regional complementary excellences and infrastructures required in the network. It also aims at identifying different business cases to define requirements for data gathering, analysis procedures, and protocols.

#### Main sets of action to implement

- Identify different business cases. There are different types of entities such as data providers and data customers. Business cases will arise from different relationships among them and third parties like RTO's.
- Analyse and discuss the role of athletes, both professional and recreational (real data generators).
- Develop systems and processes to ensure the correct use and ownership of data. As much as possible anonymization of data and personal ownership of data should be guaranteed.
- Analyse business cases to identify data, infrastructure, and other requirements.
- Map excellences in the network to identify specific competencies.
- Develop the network's offer for the business cases identified.
- Develop pilots for the most relevant business cases.

### 2.4.2. Priority two: Research, Development & Innovation (RDI) for societal, economical and sports impact

ClusSport creates a network of shared knowledge, expertise and technology to accelerate innovation applied to sports and related neighbouring industries. Through an interregional sports & vitality collaboration, the goal is to improve products and services

by developing businesses and RDI projects and to enhance their combined TRL and SRL (Technology and Service Readiness Level) by integrating them. The innovation hubs, embedded in the EPSI ecosystem, works as a centre of research, prototyping, validation and acceleration to achieve these goals.

### **Objectives and indicators of the collaboration area**

Innovation hubs will be responsible for connecting and scaling up demonstration activities in living lab environments. In this way, prototyping, testing, validating and certifying will be achieved in a faster and more efficient manner for new technologies and applications, improving market uptake. The methodology includes designing, re-designing, reformulating and testing products and services at larger levels with scale-up effects.

### **Main sets of action to implement**

- Identify the needs, complimentary excellences, actors and regional commitments
- Elaborate the working principle of the hubs in the innovation cycle, using the living lab approach;
- Elaborate the offers from the HUB to the public/private sector
- Define the different innovation instruments (existing and new) needed for an effective innovation process
- Financial engineering of the HUB concept and the instruments
- Create the large-scale pilot HUB settings to test, evaluate and improve the HUB approach
- Scale up the concept to other regions

### **2.4.3. Priority three: Venturing**

The venturing process is a basis to bring a validated idea - viable, desirable and feasible - to successful business. It consists of finding the right resources to market entrance and scale-up and it is done with combined forces of different areas of expertise. Sports is a sector that involves public needs and interests, and therefore the process must elaborate mechanisms for public and/or a mix of public/private venturing.

**Objectives and indicators of the collaboration area** - ClusSport aims at aligning and strengthening business creation's support among the partner regions in the public and/or public/private areas. It also aims at sharing and developing better practices and data-driven approaches in both sectors for business creation.

The ClusSport consortium aims at collective development of the international markets in order to achieve effective scale-up of the intersectoral businesses, both within the EU market as outside the EU.

### **Main sets of action to implement**

- Create a network of start-up acceleration programmes to share best practices and optimise their quality and impact.
- Support companies to facilitate their access to venturing investments.
- Pay special attention to public/private business creation and data-driven approaches in business creation.
- Identify and implement venturing supporting facilities for SMEs.
- Foster actions for the collective development of international markets.

### **2.4.4. Priority four: Education**

Education plays a big role in empowering skilled workforce in the field of sports & vitality for the future. Interdisciplinary educations with industrial collaborations are crucial to future professionals of the sector. Thus, ClusSport will support interregional collaboration in the field of education so as to foster skills in the sports sector and continue delivering experienced work force. It will also create partnerships with educational organisations from primary schools to higher education in existing sport-related programmes and advises regional authorities to invest in the education on sports and vitality sector.

**Objectives and indicators of the collaboration area** - The partnership aims at making skill and knowledge alliances to increase development within and between regions. It is important to integrate education with research, development and innovation activities: the development of modern education and training programs, the multidisciplinary approach and cross-sectoral collaboration; and the use of key enabling technologies.

### **Main sets of action to implement**

- Develop education and training portfolio.
- Launch and activate new education and training practices through advanced technology and digital solutions.
- Develop sports virtual entrepreneurship modules as part of education and training.
- To brand sports education.

### 3. GOVERNANCE

In this ever-changing economic situation, there is a need to develop strong, flexible but also reasonable practises for the ClusSport collaboration to enable good partnership. Therefore, in line with the EPSI fundamental governing principles and overarching framework, there is a need to set common practises for governance respected by every partner in the ClusSport consortium. This will be also the driving force for stimulating joint initiatives and projects. In the partnerships there are 3 leading and common principles to which partners contribute:

- Ambitions: each partner has clear ambitions in sports and vitality and is committed to achieve them;
- Excellence: each partner thrives for excellence on particular items that directly links to application in the field of sports and vitality;
- Focus on impact: each partner is committed to achieve economical and societal impact with their actions on sports and vitality

#### 3.1. Membership

Any European region (regional authority) that has sports and vitality as 1. a priority in their Smart Specialisation Strategy or 2. a part of their strategic operations, and that subscribes to the leading principles of ClusSport may request to become a ClusSport partner by a written procedure (i.e. addressing the *Leading regions* with the respective Letter of Commitment duly signed, stamped and dated).

The partnership in ClusSport may be exercised by the region or an appointed operator on behalf of the region. Each time a new region becomes a partner of ClusSport and unless they wish to register themselves directly, it is recommended to have at least one of its entrusted regional actors (e.g. universities, companies, research centres, clusters, sports clubs, federations or agencies) to become an EPSI (European Platform for Sports Innovation) member so as to follow all the work operationally and so as to ensure public-private partnerships.

The *Leading regions* will duly inform the ClusSport partners of new entering members.

Any of the partner regions is free to resign from the partnership at any time and at their discretion by submitting a written letter. The resignation letter will be addressed to the ClusSport partnership *Leading regions*.

#### 3.2. Values

ClusSport fundamental values are:

- 1) *Openness and inclusiveness*: ClusSport is open to new regions having sports as a priority in their Smart Specialisation Strategy with no limits or restrictions.
- 2) *Fairness*: Fair decision-making will apply with clear decision-making rules allowing proper decisions in case of opposing views.

- 3) *Commitment*: partners' active participation - either physically or via telephone or electronic means - in all ClusSport activities with time and human resources and by submitting the required information in a reasonable time frame.
- 4) *Transparency*: respect for the transparency principle. At the internal level, all members will timely and duly be informed of any decision to be taken or action to be implemented. At the external level, ClusSport will share all necessary information with stakeholders.
- 5) *Democratic Decision-making Process*: Relevant information will be duly circulated by the lead or co-lead region and/or EPSI so as to collect all ClusSport partners' reactions and point of views. Each ClusSport representative will have one voting right. Decisions will be taken by consensus. In case of deadlock, the Leading region in coordination with the Co-Leading region will liaise with the parties at the origin of the deadlock and will strive to find a compromised solution to the issue for the general interest of ClusSport.

### 3.3. Roles and responsibilities

All ClusSport partners act as dynamic members of the collaboration, participate actively to the joint activities and contribute to the overall development of the partnership.

The leading regions of ClusSport are the managers/facilitators of the collaboration process within the platform.<sup>13</sup> The leading regions are working closely together to achieve the goals as defined by the partnership and defined in the strategy. The formulation and implementation of the strategy is led by the ClusSport leading partners by guiding and encouraging all consortium members to be active and participative to realise interregional collaboration in the field of Sports&Vitality.

The leading regions are the contact points to the EU-S3 group and will also provide periodic progress reports to the EU. It will also be the direct contact line to any support that is given by the EU e.g by Reconfirm, TAF or any other support action.

The leading regions will organise the regular ClusSport meetings with the ClusSport partnership.

Communication and Dissemination is mainly carried out by EPSI, who provides support to the operational day to day activity, strategic guidance and lobbying support for regional collaboration activities since ClusSport partnership's establishment. EPSI strategic partnerships with other sectors are of importance for ClusSport operational, communication and dissemination activities and for spill-over effects over the horizontal line of the sports value chain.

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<sup>13</sup> None of the partners are funded for their work. This provides especially a large burden for the leading regions. This challenge is a continuous topic of discussion on regional and on EU level. A basic funding for the S3 platform management from the EU might be in place.

The EPSI network will also be able to provide ClusSport with valuable lobbying activities with the European Institutions and able to ensure that sports and physical activities will be considered in the broadest economic manner as a growth propeller.



## 4. FROM STRATEGY TO ACTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

For the ClusSport consortium the Sports thematic partnership has been and will remain as a stepping stone to demonstrate the role of the Sports sector in the regional economic development but also wider at the European level. While finalising this strategy, the world is battling against the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have a long-lasting effect on societal and economic realities. Now, more than ever, there is a need for forward-looking policies to support a strong collaboration in all layers and sectors. This situation will also have an effect on the ClusSport collaboration and its efforts to put the joint strategy into practise.

The core of the ClusSport strategy is to realise the common ambition to develop and implement joint actions with the lead of the regional Smart Sports Innovation Hubs. Mutual understanding and commitment to the ClusSport strategic choices and priorities provide a solid platform to develop sports and its related sectors to become a strong regional economic sector. The ClusSport consortium is a group of European regions with a very differentiated background, governance and economic structure. By using these disparities as fuel for the collaboration and to seek complementarity to accomplish the sports related value chains, ClusSport can provide benefit to its stakeholders.

The implementation of the strategy is led by the ClusSport leading partners by guiding and encouraging all consortium members to be active and participative to realise interregional collaboration in the field of Sports. We follow the 3 application areas that were defined, knowing that they are interconnected in practice: *Smart Sports Wearables - ICT4Self*, *Smart Sports environment and IoT - ICT4Env*, and *Healthy active lifestyle - Sport4Vitality*.

Development of these application areas are supported through four horizontal priorities: Data Generation, Research, Development & Innovation (RDI), Venturing and Education. Main operational responsibility is to strengthen the (development of the) regional Smart Innovation Hubs for Sports & Vitality working within ClusSport and in close collaboration with EPSI. To make the implementation of the strategy come true, it needs orchestrated governance practices at place.

The implementation of the strategy is put forward through the formulation of action plans with bottom up input from the regions, inspiration and exchange meetings and (investment) projects. The implementation plan will benefit from the basic operational model and support structures of the industrial modernisation platform: regional scoping and mapping, regional and interregional project development, TAF support for joint investment chances and ideas from the platform. Also ClusSport partnership will scan the financial instruments that are fit for the priorities that ClusSport has defined. This is a continuous process that generates new regional and interregional projects to support the industrial value chain development and the growth of sustainable sports industries.

The ClusSport activities as such are on voluntary based. It is therefore essential to develop both regional and interregional collaboration projects to generate a ClusSport collaboration that provides benefits to all. The main milestones and operational setting to foster ClusSport collaboration can be summarised for next 18-24 months in the following approach:

- **Selecting the ClusSport SDGs and determining the Green deal targets** – testimony
- **Updated governance practise agreed and in operation** – next 6 months
  - layers of the partnership (core, active, followers)
  - chain of command
  - shared responsibilities
  - communication and dissemination
  - Sports partnership continuous involvement
- **Project portfolio and pipeline development practices** – to implement in practise the priorities' main sets of actions
  - Green deal policies and sustainable development goals adaption to every project action
  - project action plan to support the priorities - mapping out the possibilities, matching with regional S3s
  - match the regional needs – regular check up
  - partnership meetings and actions to initiate interregional projects – agreed practise to empower every partner
  - Joint project planning and implementation
- **Outreaching** – towards society and possible partners
  - outreaching practises and materials – to engage partners
  - awareness rising and lobbying
  - collaboration and creating strategic partnerships with related networks etc.

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