

The strategic use of public demand for innovation in the Smart Specialization Strategy: The Italian case

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The strategic use of public demand is becoming a central theme of EU innovation policies. In the 2014-2020 programming period, innovation-related procurement was recognised as a critical driver of innovation in national and regional operative programs within cohesion policy. This paper aims to understand how the demand for innovation arises and how it is satisfied in the public sector. The analysis focuses on the entire innovation chain - from the innovation needs to the implementation and measurement of its impact. The empirical part of the paper is based on the analysis of the Italian 2021-2027 Smart Specialization Strategies (S3) and the comparison with similar documents for the programming period 2014-2020. The analysis aims to assess to what extent regions have confirmed their commitment to implement innovation-related procurement and other open innovation tools in their S3. The paper also takes advantage of data and information available from the database on public innovation procurement, managed by AgID, which provides a comprehensive picture of public innovation procurement in Italy. The preliminary results show that Italian public administrations' actual implementation of innovation procurement remains far below expectations. The paper highlights and discusses the factors explaining this situation and suggests the policy implications.