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Contemporary institutional challenges in national innovation policy governance in Poland and Sweden in the context of the European Union's competitiveness

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Abstract
This article presents a theory-informed benchmark comparison of national innovation policy governance in Poland and Sweden, and it also examines how governance capacity is associated with EU competitiveness. The study combines conceptual analysis, official institutional documents and data from the European Innovation Scoreboard 2026. The comparison is focused on five governance dimensions: political anchoring, stakeholder architecture, links between strategy and instruments, demand-side capacity, transparency and institutional learning. Sweden is chosen for the analysis as a historical functional benchmark, while Poland is assessed in the institutional form introduced on 4 November 2025 by Prime Minister's Order no. 62 amending the order establishing the Council for Innovation. The evidence indicates that the innovation gap is associated not only with expenditure, but also with coordination, participation, transparency and implementation capacity.
Keywords: holistic innovation policy, innovation policy governance, institutional innovations, Poland, Sweden, EU competitiveness, European Innovation Scoreboard

Współczesne wyzwania instytucjonalne w zakresie zarządzania krajową polityką innowacyjną w Polsce i Szwecji w kontekście konkurencyjności Unii Europejskiej

Streszczenie

W niniejszym artykule przedstawiono oparte na teorii porównanie zarządzania krajową polityką innowacyjną w Polsce i Szwecji oraz zbadano związek między zdolnością do zarządzania a konkurencyjnością UE. Badanie łączy analizę koncepcyjną, oficjalne dokumenty instytucjonalne oraz dane z Europejskiego Rankingu Innowacyjności 2026. Porównanie koncentruje się na pięciu wymiarach zarządzania: zakotwiczeniu politycznym, architekturze interesariuszy, powiązaniach między strategią a instrumentami, zdolnościach po stronie popytu oraz przejrzystości i uczeniu się instytucjonalnym. Szwecja została wybrana do analizy jako historyczny punkt odniesienia funkcjonalnego, natomiast Polska została oceniona w formie instytucjonalnej, wprowadzonej Zarządzeniem nr 62 Prezesa Rady Ministrów z dnia 4 listopada 2025 r. zmieniającym zarządzenie w sprawie utworzenia Rady do spraw Innowacyjności. Dane wskazują, że luka innowacyjna jest związana nie tylko z wydatkami, ale także z koordynacją, uczestnictwem, przejrzystością i zdolnością do wdrażania.

Słowa kluczowe: holistyczna polityka innowacyjna, zarządzanie polityką innowacyjną, innowacje instytucjonalne, Polska, Szwecja, konkurencyjność UE, Europejska tablica wyników innowacyjności (Europejski Ranking Innowacyjności)

Innovation policy has moved from the margins of economic policy to the centre of debates on productivity, technological sovereignty, resilience and the European Union's global position. The contemporary problem is not simply how much governments spend on research and development, but whether institutions can coordinate supply-side measures, demand creation, regulation, finance, skills, infrastructure and public procurement. This shift is especially relevant to the EU, whose innovation performance has improved while remaining internally differentiated and exposed to intense competition in strategic technologies.

In this article, *national innovation policy governance* denotes the cross-economy institutional arrangements, through which governments coordinate research, industrial, educational, financial, regulatory and demand-side instruments. Therefore, it does not refer narrowly to innovation within the public sector.

Methodology

This article addresses three connected levels of analysis: institutional challenges within national innovation systems, differences between Poland and Sweden under a shared EU framework, and the consequences of these differences for Union-wide competitiveness. Sweden is a useful benchmark because it combines strong innovation results with mature collaboration among government, business, research organisations and social partners. Poland has achieved rapid economic convergence and substantial digital and infrastructural modernisation, but still struggles to transform inputs into high-value innovation outputs at scale.

The research question is the following: which institutional features distinguish the Swedish and Polish approaches, and how the resulting differences in conversion capacity are reflected in measurable contributions to EU competitiveness? Contribution is assessed diagnostically through the Summary Innovation Index[1] and selected EIS indicators of venture finance, SME collaboration and innovation procurement. The study verifies the **hypothesis** that holistic innovation policy is more likely to perform effectively, when it is supported by political authority, clear accountability, permanent non-governmental participation, stable implementation mechanisms and measurable feedback. A formally comprehensive policy may remain sectoral in practice, when responsibilities are dispersed, coordination is episodic, stakeholder access is weak and coordinating bodies operate with limited transparency.

The study uses a focused, theory-informed benchmark comparison rather than a representative or causal test. Sweden was selected as a high-performing historical functional benchmark because its National Innovation Council combined central political sponsorship, external participation and links to selected instruments; Poland was selected as a contrasting case operating under the same EU framework and is assessed in the institutional form introduced by Prime Minister's Order no. 62 of 4 November 2025 amending the order establishing the Council for Innovation (see: Prezes Rady Ministrów 2025, 2016).

The corpus comprises the *European Innovation Scoreboard 2026* and country profiles, the European Commission's country reports, the Polish orders establishing and amending the Council for Innovation, official Polish government repositories, the *Swedish National Public Procurement Strategy*, official Swedish government materials, Edquist participant accounts, and OECD assessments of Sweden's innovation system. Institutional developments and systematic searches of the named public repositories were reviewed up to 5 August 2026.

Five dimensions were derived deductively from holistic and systemic literature on innovation policy, because together they reflect: authority (political anchoring), inclusion and information (stakeholder architecture), implementation (strategy-instrument linkage), market creation (demand-side capacity), adaptation and accountability (transparency and institutional learning). Institutional stability was not omitted; it is treated as a cross-cutting condition expressed in durable political sponsorship, a permanent secretariat, recurring procedures, implementation continuity and feedback arrangements rather than as a separate sixth dimension. The EIS is used only as contextual and diagnostic evidence concerning the wider national innovation systems, not as an evaluation of the Polish reform or proof that either council caused national outcomes. The design is limited by the small number of cases, differences in national structure and administrative tradition, the historical character of the Swedish benchmark, the recent character of the Polish reform, and uneven public access to council records.

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[1] *Summary Innovation Index* (SII) is a composite indicator used in the *European Innovation Scoreboard* (EIS) to measure and compare the overall innovation performance of EU Member States and partner countries.

From linear support to holistic innovation policy

Traditional innovation policy was shaped by a linear model, in which public support for science and R&D was expected to generate technologies that would subsequently diffuse into the economy. Research capacity remains indispensable, but innovation depends on interactive systems rather than a one-way sequence. Firms, users, universities, public agencies, financial institutions and regulators jointly determine whether knowledge is converted into products, processes, services and institutional solutions. Innovation policy therefore requires a policy mix rather than a single instrument (Edquist 2011; OECD 2011).

A holistic approach encompasses public actions that influence innovation. It connects science and technology policy with industrial, education, skills, regional, climate, digital, health, security and competition policies. It also combines supply-side interventions, including research grants, infrastructure and tax incentives, with demand-side tools such as innovation procurement, regulation and public-sector experimentation. The state is not merely a funder or rule-maker, but can act as a lead customer, risk-sharing investor, market shaper and coordinator of collective missions (Borrás, Edquist 2013; Edler, Georghiou 2007; Mazzucato 2011).

Holism does not require administrative centralisation of every instrument. Sectoral expertise remains necessary and implementation often belongs to specialised ministries, agencies or regional authorities. What distinguishes holistic governance is the presence of mechanisms that connect components to common objectives and resolve conflicts, overlaps and gaps. Vertical coordination aligns strategic objectives with programmes and agencies. Horizontal coordination connects sectors and mobilises resources beyond a single hierarchy.

Institutional quality is therefore a direct component of competitiveness. Stable rules reduce uncertainty (North 1990), inclusive coordination improves information, transparent priorities facilitate investment and evaluation enables adaptation. Fragmented governance increases transaction costs, duplicates interventions and weakens pathways from research to diffusion. Institutional innovation is the operating system, through which technological and social innovation are selected, enabled, scaled and legitimised.

The EU competitiveness context in 2026

The European Innovation Scoreboard 2026 reports that EU innovation performance increased by 11.6 percentage points compared with 2019 and by 1.7 points from 2025 to 2026. Yet the aggregate improvement conceals wide differences between Member States. Sweden remains the leading EU Member State, whereas Poland remains an Emerging Innovator. This divergence matters because the Union's capacity in strategic technologies depends not only on excellence at the frontier, but also on the diffusion of innovation across firms, regions and public administrations.

EU competitiveness increasingly requires the simultaneous development of research excellence, scale-up finance, digital and energy infrastructure, skills, public demand and a single market capable of supporting rapid growth. National innovation institutions are

therefore part of a multilevel European system. Weak coordination within a large Member State can reduce the effectiveness of EU funding, slow technology diffusion and create implementation gaps. Strong national systems can instead provide experiments, standards and market-shaping practices that diffuse across the Union.

The Poland–Sweden comparison should not be reduced to a ranking exercise. The countries differ in economic structure, size, development trajectory and administrative traditions, but operate under the same broad EU goals and have access to many common instruments. Their contrasting results illuminate how domestic institutions mediate European opportunities. The central issue is not whether Sweden can be copied, but which governance functions are transferable and how they can be adapted to Poland's institutional context.

Accordingly, the Swedish National Innovation Council is treated primarily as a historical functional benchmark. The Polish Council for Innovation is examined in the form introduced by amendment of 4 November 2025. Outcomes reported in EIS 2026 largely reflect broader and longer-term national innovation-system conditions and cannot be attributed to the recent Polish institutional change.

The comparative evidence makes the institutional contrast explicit. Sweden combines first place in the EU with very strong venture finance, SME collaboration and innovation procurement. Poland's substantially weaker scores are consistent with a conversion and coordination gap rather than a complete absence of innovation assets. The table therefore helps interpret the governance context of competitiveness: institutional capacity is one of several factors associated with whether knowledge, finance and public demand are translated into collaborative and market-facing innovation.

Table 1: Key comparative evidence 2026.[2]

Indicator	Poland	Sweden	Unit/benchmark
EIS innovation group	Emerging Innovator	Innovation Leader	Category
Summary Innovation Index (% of EU)	65.2	139.0	Index, EU 2026 = 100
Rank among EU Member States	23	1	Rank among EU Member States
Venture capital expenditure (% of EU)	27.1	242.9	Index, EU 2026 = 100
Innovative SMEs collaborating (% of EU)	50.1	280.4	Index, EU 2026 = 100
Innovation procurement share, 2023	6.8%	15.8%	% of total public procurement

Source: European Commission (2026a,b,c).

[2] Note: EIS indicators are indexed performance scores with EU 2026 = 100. Innovation procurement figures are actual percentages of total public procurement. Rankings and category labels are not index values.

Sweden: institutional density and conversion capacity

Sweden is an Innovation Leader with a 2026 Summary Innovation Index equal to 139.0% of the EU average, and it ranks first among EU Member States. Its relative strengths include public-private co-publications, collaboration among innovative SMEs and venture-capital expenditure. Sweden also performs strongly in human resources, attractive research systems, business R&D, ICT specialists and PCT patent applications. These results indicate a system with both deep knowledge assets and dense relationships between actors.

The institutional significance of the Swedish model is visible in the role historically played by the National Innovation Council. Chaired by the Prime Minister, it brought together ministers and external members from business, academia, trade unions and innovation finance. This composition gave innovation policy political prominence while exposing government to information and proposals from outside the ministerial system. A secretariat close to the centre of government supported continuity and cross-ministerial follow-up (Edquist 2016, 2019).

Edquist's account is especially informative because he served as a member of the Council, but it is also a participant account. Factual descriptions are therefore triangulated with official Swedish government documents, while the broader strengths and limitations of the national innovation system are interpreted against independent OECD assessments. The OECD review predates the Council and cannot evaluate it directly, but it provides an external baseline concerning the wider system, in which the Council later operated (OECD 2013).

The Council's institutional design was deliberately selective rather than corporatist. Its ten external members were appointed in a personal capacity and did not formally represent their organisations or political parties. They included participants from industry, academia, trade unions, innovative entrepreneurship and venture capital, including leaders associated with both large companies and smaller firms. Five government representatives participated: the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister for Enterprise and Innovation, the Minister for Research, and the minister responsible for international development cooperation and climate. This arrangement combined a compact governmental core with knowledge and experience that were not available within the ministerial hierarchy alone (Edquist 2016).

The location of coordination was also consequential. The Prime Minister personally chaired meetings, which were normally held four or five times a year, while the supporting secretariat operated within the Prime Minister's Office. This gave the Council greater authority in relation to sectoral ministries and created a channel, through which cross-government issues could be followed up between meetings. The Council also worked alongside a separate Research Policy Council. The distinction was important because research policy and innovation policy pursue different objectives and employ different instruments. Keeping them institutionally distinguishable helped prevent innovation policy from being reduced to research funding or science and technology policy alone (Edquist 2018, 2019).

The Council's agenda reflected that broader remit. It addressed public venture capital, functional public procurement, digitalisation, innovation partnership programmes linking companies and public agencies, artificial intelligence and the development of a holistic innovation policy. This portfolio connected supply-side capabilities with demand-side market creation and cross-sectoral coordination. It also allowed the Council to focus on a limited number of problems, where institutional barriers prevented otherwise promising technologies or firms from progressing. The Swedish arrangement therefore linked strategic discussion with the design of instruments rather than treating coordination as an end in itself.

The venture-capital case demonstrates this implementation chain. From the beginning of the Council's work in 2015, members examined how the state could support technology ventures at stages, where uncertainty and expected failure made private financing insufficient. In 2016 the government submitted the bill: *The State and Capital: A Framework for Financing Innovation and Sustainable Growth*. Parliament approved the proposals in July 2016, and the government subsequently established *Saminvest AB*, a wholly state-owned venture-capital company with capital of SEK 5 billion. Its indirect fund-of-funds model was designed to complement, rather than replace, private investment in innovative firms with high growth potential. In January 2018, *Saminvest* made its first investment, committing SEK 160 million to Hadean Capital, a life-sciences fund (Edquist 2019).

Functional public procurement followed a similar logic on the demand side. The instrument requires a public authority to describe the function to be achieved or the problem to be solved, rather than prescribing the product or technology to be purchased. Suppliers are therefore able to compete through alternative solutions, and the contracting authority becomes a lead user capable of creating a market for innovation. This distinction is especially important because public procurement represented roughly 15–20% of Swedish GDP. A small change in procurement practice can consequently mobilise a volume of demand far greater than many conventional innovation grants (Edquist et al. 2000; Edquist 2018).

Following Council discussions and legislative work in 2015–2016, the Swedish government's *National Public Procurement Strategy* (adopted in 2016) set a policy objective that public procurement should promote innovation and alternative solutions (Government Offices of Sweden 2016). This strategy did not state a five-year ambition of SEK 175 billion. That figure, approximately 5% of GDP, was Edquist's proposal or estimate of the possible scale of functional procurement after five years (Edquist 2019). The distinction is important: the official strategy established policy direction, while the quantitative scenario illustrated the potential scale of demand-side mobilisation. Research support expands the supply of knowledge, whereas functional procurement can create an arena, in which solutions are tested, purchased and diffused.

These examples clarify the basis, on which the Swedish Council can serve as a benchmark. Its value did not arise merely from formal proximity to the Prime Minister or the presence of prominent members. It arose from the combination of a manageable

agenda, personal political leadership, external expertise, a central secretariat, repeated meetings and visible translation of proposals into decisions. The benchmark is therefore functional rather than institutional in a narrow sense: other countries need not reproduce the exact membership, but they do need mechanisms that perform the same tasks of prioritisation, coordination, mobilisation, implementation and learning.

Two areas illustrate the conversion of deliberation into implementation. Discussions on innovation finance contributed to *Saminvest*, a state-owned fund-of-funds complementing private markets. Functional public procurement, in turn, allows authorities to specify a function or problem rather than a predetermined technical solution, thereby creating demand for innovation while retaining competition among alternative solutions (Edquist et al. 2000; Edquist 2019).

EIS 2026 evidence is consistent with this interpretation. Sweden's venture-capital expenditure reaches 242.9 on an index, where EU 2026 = 100, innovative SMEs collaborating with others 280.4, public-private co-publications 392.4, and business-sector R&D expenditure 164.8. Innovation procurement represented 15.8% of total public procurement in 2023, compared with an EU average of 10.5%. These indicators describe the wider ecosystem and do not demonstrate that the Council caused national performance; they show only that high-level coordination operated in a setting, where finance, collaboration and public demand were comparatively well developed.

Sweden nevertheless faces weaknesses. Job-to-job mobility of human resources in science and technology is 41.7% of the EU average, resource productivity remains below the EU average and employment in innovative enterprises weakened in the latest comparison. Strong innovation inputs do not automatically eliminate housing constraints, skills mismatches, regional concentration or integration challenges. Sweden has a high-capacity but adaptive system rather than a static ideal type.

Poland: progress without systemic transformation

Poland is an Emerging Innovator with a 2026 Summary Innovation Index equal to 65.2% of the EU average, ranking 23rd among Member States. Performance improved substantially after 2019, but declined by 1.5 percentage points from 2025 to 2026. Poland performs relatively well in design applications, cloud computing and trademark applications, while high-speed internet access and tertiary educational attainment provide a valuable foundation. The central weakness is the fragmented conversion of capacity into firm-level novelty, collaboration, scale and productivity.

Several indicators are particularly relevant. Attractive research systems stand at 40.2% of the EU average, venture-capital expenditure at 27.1%, SMEs introducing product innovations at 26.6%, public-private co-publications at 66.1%, and sales of new-to-market or new-to-firm innovations at 28.7%. Innovation procurement accounted for 6.8% of total public procurement in 2023, below the EU average of 10.5%. Gross domestic R&D expenditure reached 1.41% of GDP in 2024, compared with an EU average of 2.24%, while public R&D expenditure fell to 0.51% of GDP.

The pattern describes a system that has modernised selected inputs, but remains weak in systemic linkages. Digitalisation improved strongly, yet SME adoption of advanced technologies and knowledge diffusion remain uneven. Process adaptation is more common than product novelty. Technology transfer is constrained by fragmented governance, insufficient incentives for researchers, limited commercialisation capacity and weak collaboration among academia, public research organisations and industry. Scale-up finance remains underdeveloped despite public and EU-backed instruments.

The Council for Innovation, established in 2016 and modified in 2025, was designed to coordinate government innovation policies. Its revised mandate includes strategic directions, critical technologies, technology transfer, cooperation among ministries and agencies, support instruments, evaluation and stakeholder consultation. The scope of this mandate indicates that innovation is horizontal, but a scope without prioritisation, deadlines, indicators and implementation ownership risks making coordination declarative.

The Polish institutional landscape also changed in 2026 with the creation of the *Future Council* (pl. *Rada Przyszłości*), formally established by Prime Minister's Order no. 26 of 31 March 2026 as an auxiliary body to the Prime Minister. Its remit includes systemic proposals concerning intellectual property, commercialisation and scaling, barriers to innovation, private-capital mobilisation, talent and data, ecosystem linkages and innovation-oriented procurement (Prezes Rady Ministrów 2026). It is mentioned here, but excluded from the core comparison because it was at an early stage within the study's cut-off date and has a distinct advisory remit. Its emergence nevertheless indicates potential overlap and a future need to clarify interfaces with the Council for Innovation.

The Polish governance landscape, in which the Council operates, is extensive and differentiated. In the literature there are distinguished first-tier institutions responsible for policy formulation and implementation, especially the ministries responsible for science and the economy; second-tier ministries that pursue sectoral research and innovation tasks in areas such as health, defence, climate, internal affairs, culture, education and energy; and third-tier executive bodies, including the National Centre for Research and Development, the Polish Development Fund, the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, the National Science Centre and the Industrial Development Agency. The challenge is therefore not an absence of organisations, but the absence of an authoritative mechanism that aligns their objectives, budgets and implementation cycles (Kwieciński 2014).

The 2025 amendment gave the Council a notably ambitious catalogue of tasks. It is expected to foster an administrative culture of experimentation and learning; propose, monitor and evaluate strategic directions in research, development and innovation; address critical technologies relevant to security, growth and social cohesion; remove barriers to knowledge and technology transfer; promote inter-ministerial and inter-agency cooperation; design initiatives increasing innovation in society, the economy and public administration; propose principles for support instruments; assess the effectiveness of technology and innovation policy; cooperate with the Council for Innovation in Higher

Education and Science; and consult industry, employers and non-governmental organisations. Taken together, these tasks amount to a whole-of-government innovation mandate.

The difficulty is that the mandate does not itself establish an operating model. Many tasks are formulated as broadly as "fostering values", "proposing measures" or "creating synergies". They do not specify baselines, outputs, decision deadlines, implementation owners or review points. Evaluated against the SMART criteria, they are only partly specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. The institutional risk is that nearly every innovation-related issue can be placed on the Council's agenda, while no issue is defined precisely enough to generate accountability. A broad remit therefore needs to be converted into a small number of missions, each supported by a delivery plan and publicly reported indicators.

The composition adopted in 2025 reinforces this concern. The chair is the minister responsible for the economy, supported by the ministers responsible for digitalisation and higher education and science as vice-chairs. The remaining members encompass a wide range of ministerial portfolios, including public administration, state assets, construction and spatial planning, energy, finance, maritime affairs, energy resources, water management, climate, culture, defence, education, agriculture, regional development, fisheries, transport, internal and foreign affairs, health and inland waterways, together with a Secretary of State in the Prime Minister's Office. In functional terms, the Council is close to a specialised replica of the Council of Ministers. Such scope can secure formal coverage of sectors, but it also produces three problems. First, a body composed mainly of ministers may reproduce the same departmental positions that coordination is intended to overcome. Second, a very large membership increases the cost of substantive deliberation and makes prioritisation more difficult. Third, the actors named as consultation partners in the Council's mandate, including business, research organisations, employers and non-governmental organisations, are not integrated as permanent members on terms comparable with the Swedish external members. Consultation is therefore episodic rather than embedded in problem definition and decision-making.

The difference in political anchoring is equally important. In Sweden, the Prime Minister chaired the Council and the secretariat was located in the Prime Minister's Office, giving the body authority above individual ministries. In Poland, ministerial leadership may facilitate work within the economy portfolio, but it does not automatically provide the leverage necessary to reconcile priorities across science, finance, energy, health, defence, digital and regional policy. The participation of a representative of the Prime Minister's Office does not by itself reproduce prime-ministerial ownership. For issues involving competing budgets or regulations, the Council therefore needs a formal escalation path to the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers.

A further limitation is related to the observable outputs of coordination. The authors searched the Public Information Bulletin of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, the official website gov.pl, *Monitor Polski* and the *Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych* for agendas,

resolutions, and progress reports, completing the search on 5 August 2026.[3] No publicly accessible Council's documents were identified in the repositories examined for that date; however, this does not exclude the existence of internal records. The available public evidence does not permit assessment of the Council's contribution to priorities, instruments or implementation. If agendas, resolutions, responsible institutions, deadlines and progress reports cannot be examined, stakeholders and researchers cannot independently distinguish effective coordination from formal existence.

The Polish case consequently demonstrates a mismatch between institutional form and policy function (Sroka 2025). The Council has a comprehensive mandate, but lacks a compact stakeholder architecture, central political sponsorship, a visible delivery mechanism and transparent evidence of results. Its structure is capable of exchanging information across ministries, but information exchange is not equivalent to policy integration. The Swedish benchmark shows that the National Innovation Council becomes consequential, when deliberation is linked to selected instruments and when external knowledge is incorporated before decisions are fixed, not only through consultation after proposals have already been developed.

The Council is predominantly governmental and resembles an enlarged inter-ministerial committee. External stakeholders do not have a permanent role equivalent to that found in the Swedish benchmark. The chair is the minister responsible for the economy rather than the Prime Minister. This may provide sectoral leadership, but it weakens authority, when priorities cross ministerial boundaries or require trade-offs among budgets, regulations and agency mandates.

Transparency is also material. A coordinating body gains credibility, when agendas, analytical papers, decisions, responsible institutions, deadlines and progress reports are publicly available. Limited visibility makes it difficult to assess whether broad tasks are converted into decisions and whether implementation is monitored. Without a visible feedback loop, stakeholders cannot learn from policy, hold institutions accountable or align investment with public priorities.

Poland's institutional challenge is therefore a gap between formal comprehensiveness and operational integration. Numerous ministries, agencies, programmes and regional strategies address innovation, but the system lacks a sufficiently strong mechanism that converts them into a coherent portfolio. The consequences include overlapping interventions, unstable priorities, weak demand-side policy, insufficient market creation and limited scaling.

Comparative institutional assessment

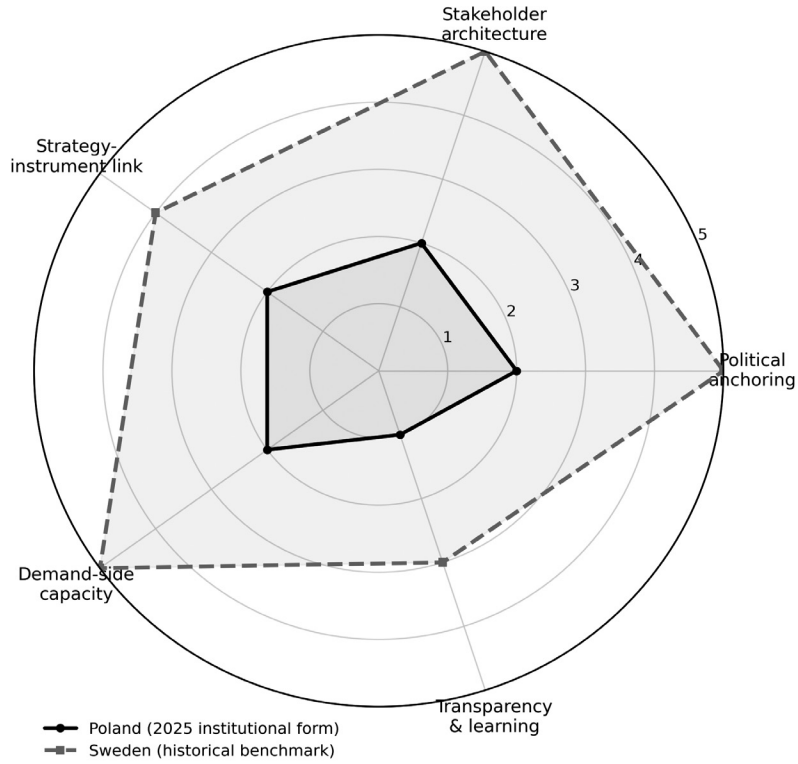
Five governance dimensions structure the benchmark comparison and help interpret, rather than causally explain, the performance gap.

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[3] One search result was an administrative notice concerning the return of fundings under the *Innovative Economy Operational Programme 2007–2013*; but as it is not related to decisions or work of the Council for Innovation, it was excluded from the evidence base.

First is political anchoring. Swedish innovation governance was elevated to the centre of government and chaired by the Prime Minister, while Polish coordination is located at ministerial level. Central anchoring does not guarantee success, but it may strengthen the capacity to resolve cross-sectoral conflicts and signal a whole-of-government priority.

Figure 1: Theory-informed benchmark coding of five governance dimensions.[4]



Source: the authors' own elaboration.

Second is stakeholder architecture. Sweden integrated business, academia, labour and finance into the Council's core. Poland relies more heavily on governmental representation and external consultation. Permanent participation can improve problem

[4] Note: Ordinal coding uses a common rubric: 1 = no identifiable mechanism; 2 = a formal mandate without recurring implementation evidence; 3 = a partial or episodic mechanism; 4 = an established mechanism with documented follow-up; 5 = a central, recurring mechanism linked to implementation. Scores are based on the institutional evidence reviewed in the article: Poland = 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, and Sweden = 5, 5, 4, 5, 3 – for political anchoring, stakeholder architecture, strategy-instrument linkage, demand-side capacity, transparency and learning, respectively. This coding is an analytical synthesis, not an EIS measure, causal estimate or ranking of overall national innovation performance.

definition, reveal implementation barriers and create shared ownership, provided that selection, conflict-of-interest rules and representation are transparent.

Third is the connection between the strategy and instruments. Swedish deliberation was linked to concrete tools such as risk finance and functional procurement. Poland's mandate covers many objectives but does not itself establish a sequence from problem diagnosis to instrument design, implementation and evaluation. A council should therefore work through a limited number of missions or portfolios, each with a theory of change, responsible lead, milestones and an evidence plan.

Fourth is demand-side capacity. Sweden's stronger innovation-procurement share demonstrates how the public sector can become a lead market. Poland's procurement system remains used mainly for compliant acquisition rather than systematic market shaping. Functional specifications, pre-commercial procurement, innovation partnerships and challenge-based purchasing can create demand, provided that contracting authorities receive legal, technical and risk-management support.

Fifth is transparency and institutional learning. Innovation policy involves uncertainty, so failure cannot be eliminated but can be made informative. Published agendas, minutes, decisions, dashboards and independent evaluations allow adjustment and diffusion of lessons. Poland needs more formalised learning mechanisms precisely because inter-institutional coordination is less mature.

Poland's weaker performance is therefore not solely a resource deficit. Sustainable public R&D funding and scale-up capital remain necessary, but additional funding without reform of coordination, incentives and demand may reproduce fragmentation. Institutional capacity determines whether public expenditure crowds in private investment, enables collaboration and reaches firms capable of scaling.

Implications for EU competitiveness

The comparison has direct European implications. The EU's innovation frontier depends on leaders such as Sweden, but aggregate competitiveness also requires higher innovation intensity in large catching-up economies. Poland's manufacturing base, market size, engineering capacity and position in European value chains give it significant potential. Stronger research-business links, advanced digital adoption and scale-up finance would allow Poland to contribute more to European technological capacity and resilience.

A more integrated Polish system would improve the strategic use of EU instruments. European programmes are most effective, when national institutions coordinate project pipelines, regulatory reforms, co-financing and dissemination. Fragmentation can turn EU policy into a collection of projects rather than a transformation strategy. A mission-oriented portfolio can instead connect *Horizon Europe*, cohesion policy, *InvestEU*, the European Innovation Council and national resources around common outcomes.

Sweden demonstrates the value of collaborative governance, venture finance, research-business linkages and innovation procurement. Its weaknesses also reveal

Union-wide issues concerning labour mobility, skills, regional concentration and the gap between strong inputs and broad productivity gains. The EU objective should therefore be functional convergence around capabilities every innovation system needs: strategic coordination, experimentation, finance, demand, diffusion and accountability.

Reform agenda for Poland

The reform should be focused on operating system of the Council for Innovation rather than merely its legal task list. Poland's lower innovation-procurement share and weak market outcomes suggest that grants alone are insufficient. The Council could select cross-sectoral challenges for functional procurement, coordinate market consultations and link procurement pipelines with technology-transfer, demonstration and scale-up finance. In this model, the Council would not manage every programme. It would remove system-level barriers and ensure that ministries and agencies use complementary instruments around shared outcomes.

First, innovation coordination should receive a stronger political mandate. The Council for Innovation should report regularly to the Prime Minister and the Council of Ministers on a short portfolio of cross-government priorities. Government should approve missions, resolve disputes and review delivery. A permanent secretariat with analytical, foresight and programme-management capacity should support the Council, prepare diagnostics, keep evidence, maintain a portfolio dashboard and monitor implementation.

Second, the Council should become a mixed governance body. A compact decision-making core should include selected ministers and independent members from innovative firms, SMEs, universities, research organisations, financial institutions, trade unions, representatives of regions and civil society. Fixed terms, transparent selection and conflict-of-interest rules are essential. Wider consultation can be organised through mission-specific panels.

Third, the Council should use a measurable portfolio approach. Each mission should define the problem, expected public value, baseline, milestones, lead institution, partner agencies, funding sources, regulatory actions and evaluation method. A public dashboard should track outputs, outcomes and risks, including procurement uptake, private co-investment, collaboration, time to market, scale-up performance and regional diffusion. Published documents need not disclose confidential commercial information, but they should make decisions and accountability visible.

Fourth, Poland should expand demand-side innovation policy. Central purchasing bodies, municipalities, hospitals, energy and transport operators need support in using functional procurement and innovation partnerships. A competence centre could provide model documentation, market consultation methods, legal advice and risk-sharing arrangements. Targets should be linked to measurable public challenges rather than treated as administrative quotas.

Fifth, public finance should address the full innovation cycle. Research grants need connections to proof-of-concept funding, demonstration, procurement, growth capital

and export support. Public funds should complement rather than displace private finance. Independent governance, professional investment selection and transparent additionality criteria are essential. The priority is to close discontinuities between instruments rather than simply multiply them.

Sixth, science-business cooperation requires incentive reform. Research careers and institutional funding should reward high-quality collaboration, technology transfer and societal impact without weakening scientific excellence. Technology-transfer offices need professional specialisation and shared legal and market expertise. Mobility between academia, industry and administration should be easier, including temporary appointments and jointly funded positions.

Finally, institutional reform should be iterative. Pilot missions should be independently evaluated, and ineffective instruments redesigned or terminated. Public reporting should distinguish experimentation from implementation failure and external shocks. A mature innovation state is not one that avoids all failure, but one that learns quickly, preserves credibility and reallocates resources on evidence.

Conclusions

Poland and Sweden illustrate different capacities to organise public innovation policy within the EU. Sweden combines high research and business investment with collaborative institutions, venture finance, innovation-oriented procurement and strong public-private linkages. Poland has improved important inputs, especially digital infrastructure and parts of human capital, but remains constrained by weak conversion into product innovation, market outcomes, collaboration and productivity.

The institutional explanation is central. Sweden demonstrates the value of political anchoring, a compact and plural governance arena, an implementation-oriented secretariat and direct links between deliberation and instruments. Poland's Council for Innovation has a broad horizontal mandate, but its predominantly governmental composition, ministerial positioning, diffuse tasks and limited public visibility weaken its capacity to act as a strategic integrator.

At the EU level, the answer to the research question is that two governance configurations are associated with markedly different conversion outcomes. Sweden's centrally anchored, plural and implementation-linked model coexists with SII of 139.0, venture-capital expenditure of 242.9 and innovative-SME collaboration of 280.4 on the EU 2026 = 100 index, together with innovation-procurement share of 15.8%. Poland's more ministerial, predominantly governmental and less transparent configuration coexists with SII of 65.2, corresponding scores of 27.1 and 50.1, and a 6.8% procurement share. These indicators do not indicate causality, but they operationalise the competitiveness link examined here: stronger conversion of knowledge, finance, collaboration and public demand increases a Member State's contribution to the EU innovation base, while weaker conversion limits diffusion and aggregate performance. Common programmes and financial instruments cannot substitute for domestic institutions able to assemble

project pipelines, align regulation, create demand and disseminate results. Innovation Leaders can provide benchmarks, but institutional transfer should concentrate on functions rather than formal imitation. For Poland, the most transferable Swedish features are high-level political sponsorship, a compact mixed membership, a permanent central secretariat, recurring meetings, a selective problem-oriented agenda and public evidence connecting deliberation with implementation.

A reformed Polish Council could become the place, where technologies, public challenges and European funding are connected in a coherent portfolio. Its success should be assessed through additional private investment, innovation-oriented procurement, science-business collaboration, technology diffusion, scale-up performance and measurable public value, rather than by the number of meetings or programmes discussed. This would help open the "black box" of Poland's latent innovative potential while reducing the path-dependent persistence of fragmented, linear and predominantly supply-side policy.

Poland does not primarily need a larger catalogue of programmes. It needs a stronger operating model for selecting priorities, coordinating portfolios, creating demand, mobilising finance, involving stakeholders and learning from results. Reform in these areas would improve national innovation performance and enlarge the EU's ability to transform scientific and technological assets into productive, secure and sustainable growth. Institutional innovation in Member States is itself a component of European competitiveness.

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