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European Union
Regional policy



Erik

N E T W O R K

European regional programmes of innovative actions:

Laboratories for innovation



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Regions in the global economy

The demands of the global economy mean that regions must become more innovative to keep a competitive edge and to promote development in a sustainable way. To meet this challenge, the European Summit of Lisbon of March 2000 set out a strategy designed to make Europe “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world” by 2010 by encouraging enterprise, innovation and research. The European summit of Gothenburg in June 2001 added a new dimension to this strategy with an emphasis on protecting the environment and achieving a more sustainable pattern of development.

The enlargement of the European Union to 25 Member States has heightened the need to improve the competitiveness and internal cohesion of the Union. Not only have regional disparities in the field of research and innovation continued to grow in most European countries during recent years, but enlargement has increased the economic development gap between European regions.

To compete in today's economy and to keep or, even better, to attract the best people and the best companies, each region needs to capitalise on its knowledge base and to develop its capacity to innovate. Innovation should not be seen in a restrictive sense but should underpin all aspects of regional planning and policy development. Whether it be in the design of new products in companies or in the introduction of new working

methods and processes among regional partners, a region's success will depend on the distribution of knowledge and a genuine partnership amongst individuals, enterprises, research institutions, associations, and regional administrations.

The Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) have been specifically formulated to give regions the opportunity to experiment in this area. Over the period 2000-06, approximately 400 million euros has been set aside for these programmes in 156 eligible regions. Individual regions can apply for a grant of up to 3 million euros to co-finance a programme to promote innovation taking its specific needs and characteristics into account.

The total value of ERDF co-funding for programmes approved up to November 2004 is 346 million euros. When the contribution from the public and private sectors in the regions is added, this rises to a total volume of roughly 660 million euros. On average, the ERDF has contributed 52% of the total budget of the programmes, the public sector (regional and national) 34% and the private sector 14%.

Why does the EU promote regional programmes of innovative actions ?

Because in the increasingly knowledge-based economy, innovation holds the key to regional competitiveness.

Innovation, an engine for regional development

Innovation can relate to a process or a product. It affects companies, institutions, organisations and society as a whole. It involves the transformation of an idea into a marketable product or service, a new or improved manufacturing or distribution process, or new services for citizens in various sectors such as health, education and training, or in public administration.

Regions are key players in the global economy: they are the first to be affected by economic changes and they represent the right “critical mass” to manage them. They have to build on their unique characteristics, their people, and their cultural and environmental assets. To attract companies and well-trained people, to improve their competitive edge, they need to continually create and take advantage of new opportunities. The focus of these regional programmes is to boost regional capacity to develop a knowledge-based economy and to develop pro-active policies which can profit from the latest technologies in a sustainable way which protects and enhances its own special regional characteristics.

Thinking strategically

The Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions encourage regions to take a strategic approach to innovation and to find new long-term solutions to their development needs. This need to adopt a holistic approach was one of the main lessons learnt through ten years of support to innovative experiments by the European funds. The regional programmes offer an opportunity outside the mainstream programmes of the Structural Funds which often have strictly-defined objectives. They allow regions, to experiment with activities that are out of the ordinary or to work in different, often new, types of partnerships in one or more of three interlinked areas: *technology and knowledge based economy, the information society, and sustainable development and regional identity*. One of the main objectives is to stimulate a region's capacity and effectiveness of innovation by strengthening regional partnerships, stimulating demand for innovation within SMEs, making better use of the knowledge capacity in the region and improving regional firms' access to external knowledge.

Three strategic themes for regional development

In line with the Lisbon and Gothenburg objectives, regions have been invited to focus on one or more of the following strategic themes:

- Regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation

To meet the challenge of the Lisbon Strategy and create efficient and competitive regional innovation systems, the Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions encourage the co-operation between the public sector and the bodies responsible for research and businesses. The main objectives common to all programmes are to stimulate demand for innovation within SMEs, to get knowledge into firms using new technology transfer mechanisms and to make better use of the fruits of research. Clustering, incubators, spin-off, support to research and technological projects, new technological services to business, are some of the concrete actions financed within the regional programmes.

- e-Europe Regio: the information society at the service of regional development

By promoting networking the "net-economy" can make a significant contribution to the geographical and economic opening-up of the European regions. The new opportunities offered by the growth of information and communication technologies will enable regions to reduce their handicaps (particularly peripheral regions) and develop their assets by reinforcing the competitiveness of businesses, especially SMEs. Support for e-Business (e-commerce, web services, knowledge management tools), for e-Government (services and applications for local administration and citizens) and for e-Learning solutions (broadband tele-working, distance training) are the principal activities in the programmes.

- Sustainable development and regional identity

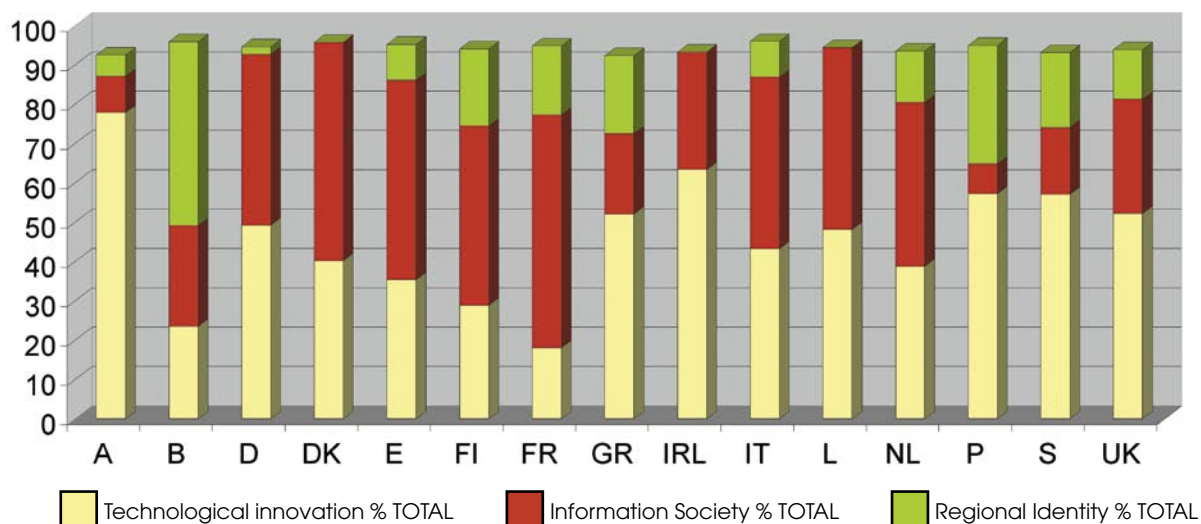
Sustainable development means integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of regional planning. Regions are encouraged to build on their assets to develop a sustainable and competitive economy. A regional strategy should be based on its heritage and cultural diversity, or on its specific skills, its strategic location, its exceptionally high-quality environment or its educational and cultural infrastructure, etc. New applications for energy and waste management, sustainable tourism and innovative technologies for enterprises in the environmental sector are some of the actions co-financed in the regional programmes.

Positive response from regions

The offer of a Regional Programme of Innovative Actions elicited a very positive response from the regions : by November 2004, 139 of the 156 eligible regions were participating including all regions of Austria, Italy, Ireland, Greece, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, as well as Denmark and Luxembourg.

The synergy between the three strategic themes has been well exploited by most regions who have opted to include a number of actions covering at least two of the three eligible themes.

Strategic themes covered by regional programmes in the Member States



Laboratories for innovation

The Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions have succeeded in acting as catalysts giving the regions a chance to experiment with new actions to promote innovation. Most programmes have taken a comprehensive approach to innovation, designing new products, processes or services and in some cases, new forms of co-operation between the public and the private sectors. This has helped the regions develop a coherent approach to innovation and sustainable development in order to secure their long-term competitiveness.

The programmes contain adventurous actions that otherwise might have been postponed or been ignored in the mainstream Structural Fund programmes in spite of their potentially strong impact on regional competitiveness. For the least-developed regions it has been particularly important to have the opportunity to experiment in the three strategic themes on offer which are traditionally under-funded by comparison with other types of needs such as those concerned with infrastructure.

A further value of the innovative actions lies in the way these programmes have been designed and implemented directly by regional stakeholders working together in partnership. Successful regions understand how to link local and regional enterprises, universities, research institutions, associations, and public administration to collect the know-how and distribute it amongst individuals and business so that it can be transformed into new products, processes and services.

Each region has been encouraged to find its own solutions, based on regional needs and potential, to fully incorporate innovation in its regional development planning. The regional programmes have been designed and managed directly by the regions without any national implication in the decision-making process. Regional governments have taken full responsibility for improving conditions crucial for their future competitiveness in cooperation with their local stakeholders. This has been done in partnership with the private sector which was involved in the drawing up and the implementation of the programmes.

To highlight some of the best outcomes of these programmes under each of the three strategic themes a competition was launched in 2003 by the European Commission. An independent jury of high-level experts selected three projects in each category amongst the 72 projects submitted, on the basis of their innovative character and their quality.

Nanobiotechnology rescues Saarland economy

Within the Regional Programme of Innovative Actions for Saarland (Germany), a new **centre for excellence in nanobiotechnology** has been created to enhance the scientific basis of Saarland, to overcome the declining industrial economy of the mining sector and to help the region become an internationally-competitive location in the field of nanobiotechnology. The project aims to create new jobs in a reasonable time-frame by providing a structural support covering many industry branches and connecting existing competencies in the field of a promising technology.

The project was initiated by the Ministry for Economic affairs, and was based on a partnership involving schools, research institutions, and different industries. The task of the centre is to push forward the networking process and to assume both a driving role and that of a broker. The construction, extension and management of the decentralised centre is based on the concept of a virtual company acting along the entire added value chain

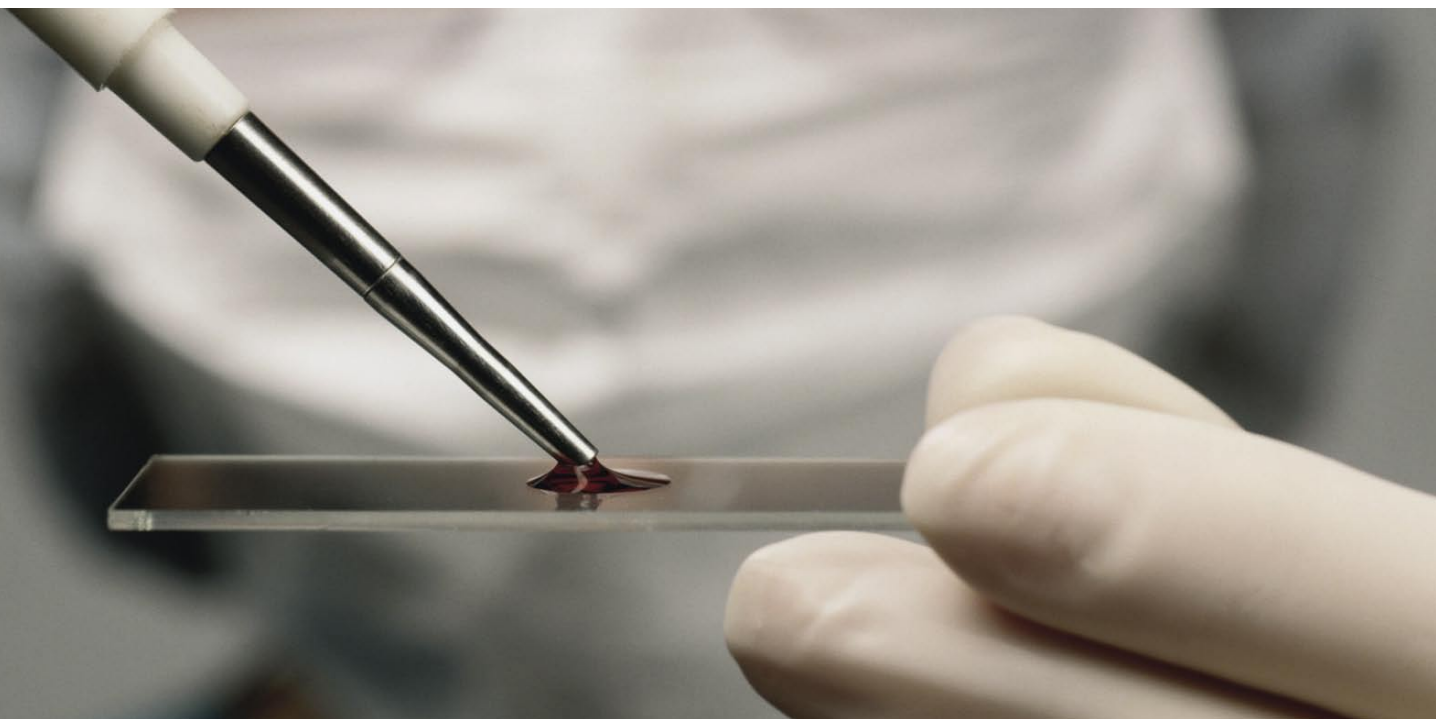
in the fields of training, research, development, innovation, marketing and sales. The centre for excellence is managed by a private company.

Concretely, this decentralised network brings together public and private partners and various areas of expertise that complement each other to develop jointly new products and services. A common central service office is responsible for initiating cooperative projects, for targeting the transfer of technology, for raising awareness amongst students, the public in general and companies of the opportunities offered by nanobiotechnology, and for promoting contacts at international trade fairs and conferences.

This project was awarded 1st prize in a competition organised by the European Commission under the theme "Regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation: helping regions to raise their technological level".

For more information:

<http://www.biokom.saarland.de>
j.wollbold@wirtschaft.saarland.de



Open Software to open minds

The Regional Programme of Innovative Action in Extremadura (Spain) aims to improve technological literacy, enable the creation and adaptation of digital contents and promote a new business and labour culture. In this framework, the Extremadura Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, launched the project **gnuLinEx**, which was primarily designed as a support to the Education Technological Network (the intranet that connects all schools of the region with broad band access). It consisted in the distribution and the use of an operating system based on a Free and Open Source Software providing applications with low maintenance costs, independent from a single supplier, easy to use and flexible, and adapted to local needs.

The system was implemented, tested and improved by the regional education institutions in close cooperation with teachers. The objective was to reach the ratio of a PC for 2 pupils in secondary education and a PC for 6 pupils in primary education, which meant that at the end of the project, 66.000 computers were working with **gnuLinEx** and 183.000 pupils and 16.000 teachers were using this alternate software in order to enhance the educational community technological literacy.

The **gnuLinEx** project created new companies and businesses in content development and applications based in free software, in a new regional market. Because the applications developed are based on a system which can be copied, modified, distributed and used freely, they can

easily be adapted to the needs of sectors or users. Other Spanish and European regions as well as 5 countries worldwide (India, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina and Chile) are planning to cooperate with the Extremadura region.

This project was awarded 1st price in a competition organised by the European Commission under the theme "e-Europe-Regio: the information society at the service of regional development".



For more information:

<http://www.linex.org>
consejero@ect.juntaex.es

An environmental friendly house

The Regional Programme of Innovative Action in the Steiermark region of Austria aims to develop new sustainable products by making use of existing natural resources with a network of local know-how institutions. In this framework, the Regional government of Styria launched the project **TANNO meets GEMINI**.

This sustainable development project was initiated in order to merge the knowledge and experience gained from **TANNO** (ecologically designed low-energy consuming homes which use fir as their main building material) and **GEMINI** (a house that rotates in relation to the sun to make optimal use of the sun's energy and thereby produces more energy than it consumes). It aims to manufacture energy-efficient, low-cost homes using local natural wood resources. The end product is a multi-purpose, ecologically and cost efficient construction system which can be implemented and adapted regionally as well as internationally, without the need for changing its basic structure.

This project was awarded 1st price in a competition organised by the European Commission under the theme "Regional Identity and Sustainable Development".

For more information:

<http://www.steiermark.at>
gerd.gratzer@stmk.gv.at





Exchange of experiences and networking among regions

In addition to the Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions, three networks, one per strategic theme, were launched to foster co-operation between regions and to share experiences and good practices:

ERIK (European Regions Knowledge-based Innovation Network) for technological innovation, which is led by Toscana and Emilia-Romagna;

IANIS (Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society) for Information society at the service of regional development, which is led by Sachsen;

A **Pan-European Network for Sustainable Development**, which is led by Wales.

These complementary activities are designed to enhance the exchange of information, experience, know-how and expertise between the participating regions — especially with a view to improving and increasing the use of Structural Funds' investments and more generally for regional economic and social development. The activities of these networks include workshops, seminars, study visits, conferences, sharing of experience and good practice through an electronic communications platform, physical and virtual newsletters, policy forum etc.

From pilot actions to generalisation: building on the lessons learned

The challenge now for the regions is to capitalise on the emerging experiences in order to stimulate regional innovation on a wider scale. It is also expected that lessons learnt will be incorporated into the future Structural Funds programmes, especially in the new Member States, and to the extent possible, the current Objective 1 and Objective 2 programmes.

Specific attention will be given to regions from new Member States to facilitate their participation in networking activities as a means of disseminating good practices. This will also help them with the preparation of the next generation of Structural Funds programmes.

Innovation has become a priority in the future generation of Structural Funds post-2006 and many of the features of the innovative actions programmes have been incorporated into the future objective of regional competitiveness and employment for the period 2007-2013. This will help regions to view innovation as a crucial factor for regional development, and provide them with the basis to be at the fore front of the knowledge society.

To innovate is to make progress and Europe can claim real success stories in its regions.

For more information on the regions and the thematic networks participating in innovative actions and for contact details, go to the websites :

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/prog_en.htm

<http://www.eriknetwork.net>

<http://www.ianis.net/>

<http://www.sustainableregions.net>

Or alternatively contact:

Innovative Actions unit

European Commission, Directorate general for Regional Policy

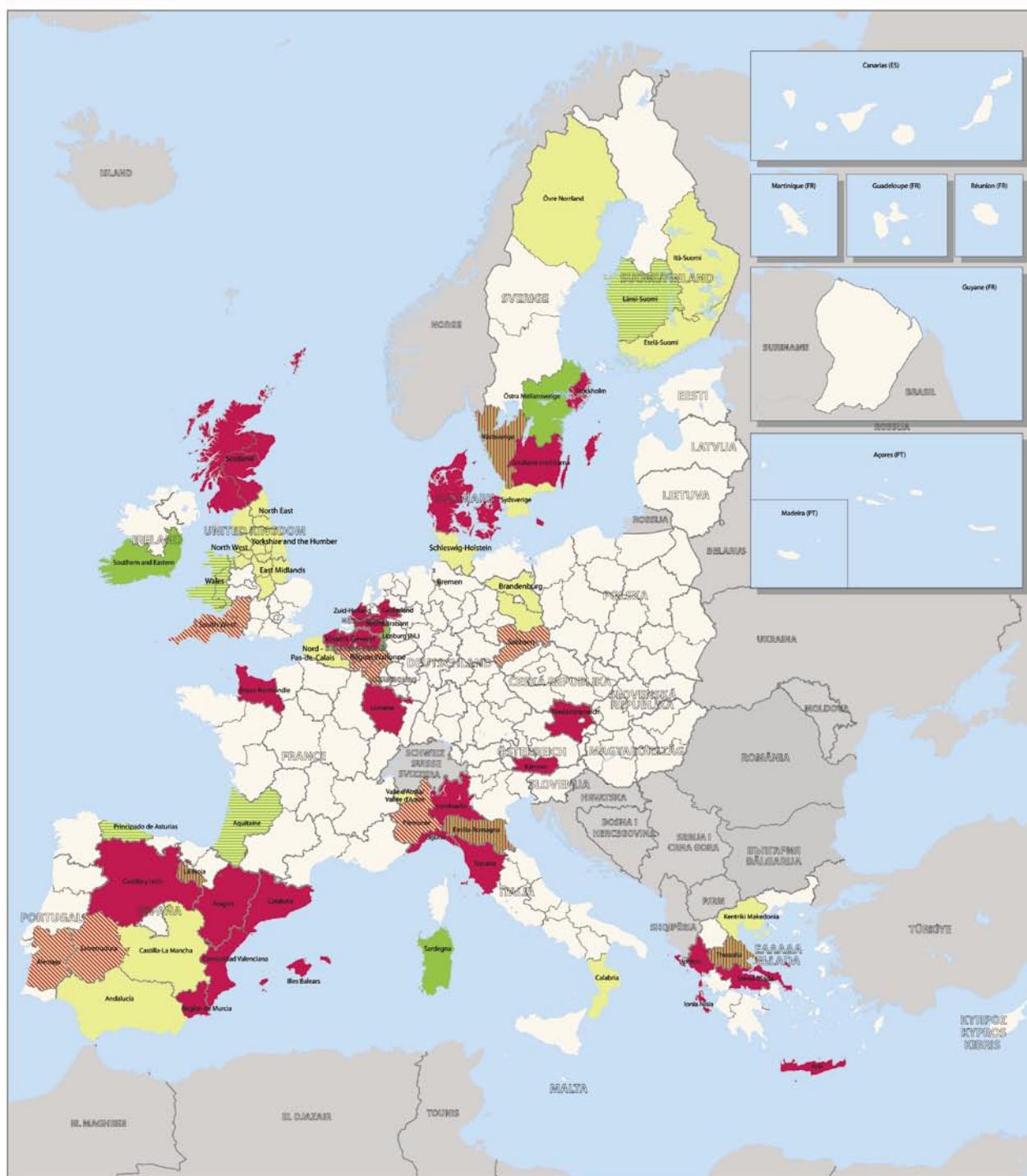
regio-innovative-actions@cec.eu.int

http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/index_en.htm

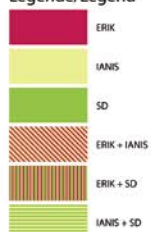


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POLITIQUE REGIONALE
DGREGIO-SIG

Union Européenne - European Union Réseaux d'Actions Innovatrices Network of Innovative Actions



Légende/Legend



EU25, Régions = NUTS2 ; BE, DE, UK = NUTS1

Source : DG-Regio (31/05/2004)



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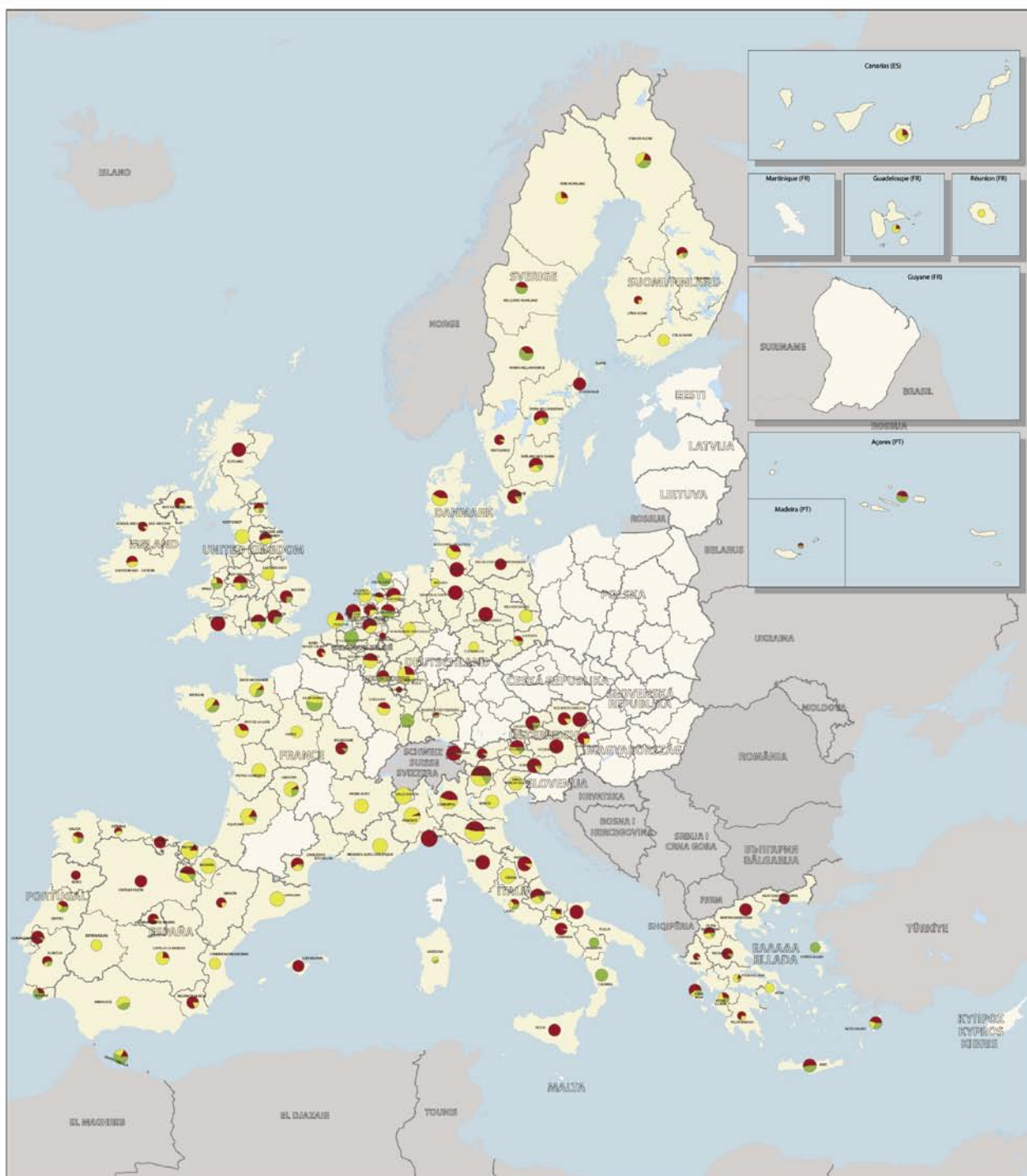


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Union Européenne - European Union

FEDER : Programmes Régionaux d'Actions Innovatrices 2001-2006

ERDF : Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions 2001-2006



Légende / Legend

- 6 800 K€ (FEDER + région) investissement total
(ERDF + région) total investment
- Economie régionale fondée sur la connaissance et l'innovation technologique
Regional economies based on knowledge and technological innovation
- eEuropeRegio : la société de l'information au service du développement régional
eEuropeRegio : the information society at the service of regional development
- Identité régionale et développement durable
Regional identity and sustainable development

EU25, Régions = NUTS2; BE, DE, UK = NUTS1

Hors mesures d'accompagnement et assistance technique
Excluding accompanying measures and technical assistance

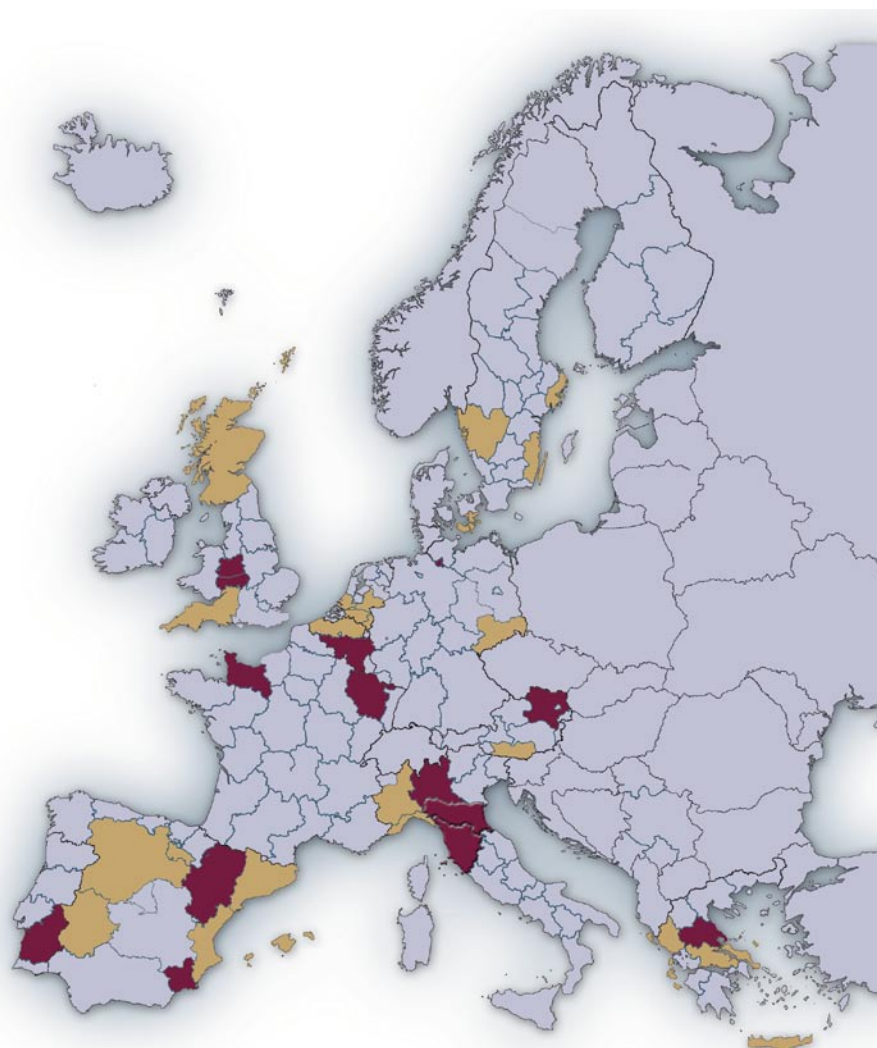
NUTS2 = Trentino-Alto Adige (Bolzano-Bozen) (1 prg.) +
Trento (1 prg.) + Cava y Melilla (Cava) (1 prg.) + Melilla (1 prg.)

Source : DG-Regio (31/05/2004)



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Toscana (Italy)
Emilia Romagna (Italy)
Nieder Österreich (Austria)
Wallonie (Belgium)
Basse Normandie (France)
Lorraine (France)
Bremen (Germany)
Lombardia (Italy)
Thessaly (Greece)
Alentejo (Portugal)
Aragon (Spain)
Murcia (Spain)
West Midlands (UK)

Erik Associate Partners

Carinthia (Austria)
Flanders (Belgium)
Storstrøm (Denmark)
Sachsen (Germany)
Crete Region (Greece)
Epirus (Greece)
Ionian Islands (Greece)
Sterea Ellada (Greece)
Liguria (Italy)
Piemonte (Italy)
Gelderland (Netherlands)
North-Brabant (Netherlands)
South Holland (Netherlands)
Balears (Spain)
Castilla y León (Spain)
Catalunya (Spain)
Extremadura (Spain)
La Rioja (Spain)
Valencia (Spain)
Kalmar (Sweden)
Stockholm (Sweden)
Västra Götaland (Sweden)
Scotland (United Kingdom)
South West England (U.K.)

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