



## ERIK ACTION FINAL CONFERENCE

### Thematic Sessions: Challenges and Successes of Good Practice Transfer

*WITHIN ERIK ACTION A RANGE OF GOOD PRACTICES WERE ANALYSED, AND EVERY PARTNER FOUND AT LEAST 1 INITIATIVE TO BE IMPLEMENTED IN THEIR REGION. THE 4 CONFERENCE THEMATIC SESSIONS WERE DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF THESE GOOD PRACTICES. THEY DEAL WITH THE CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES OF TRANSFER AS WELL AS FUTURE ISSUES.*

### **Overview of Thematic Session 1: Responsible and Sustainable Solutions**

This session was born from the Fabrica Ethica transfer group. Fabrica Ethica is a Good Practice on regional policies for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) exported by the Regione Toscana ([www.fabricaethica.it](http://www.fabricaethica.it)).

The session was moderated by Marisa Parmigiani, Head of Social Policies at National Level for ANCC Coop.



The session welcomed the participation of speakers from three ERIK ACTION project partners:

- Giuseppina De Lorenzo, Head of Programme for Corporate Social Responsibility, Regione Toscana
- Håkan Brynielsson, Director, Regional Council of the County of Kalmar
- Bernard De Potter, Administrator General, Enterprise Flanders



The session addressed a various key questions including the link between environmental and social responsibility and increased innovation, challenges to promoting CSR in enterprises and how cooperation can overcome them, and the lessons learned from projects such as ERIK ACTION. Furthermore, discussion focused on the shift of our economy from a local to a global context and the new challenges that this brings. Nowadays, in order to improve competitiveness, SMEs must think globally and push sustainability as a driver for innovation, and vice-versa.

Therefore, in the realm of global economy and increased consumer power, harmonisation of CSR standards becomes important, particularly in the fields of: transparency and accountability, in order to be open towards consumers and responsible for ones actions; respect for human rights; maintenance of high standards of ethical behaviour. This includes pursuing and applying social responsibility even in an international context where not all countries respect similar standards of human rights.

In this context, a common strategy should link CSR and innovation to provide real economic and social return. Social responsibility can be a tool for upgrading the innovation capacities of firms, for building new experiences and for developing means of addressing market dynamics.

European interregional cooperation can play a crucial role. It can help SMEs to build long lasting networks, thus boosting their operations through critical mass. It can help to build a common understanding of CSR, thus facilitating the practical implementation of legislation, policies and initiatives.

There are many open questions on CSR for SMEs, and these should continue to be addressed in a coordinated manner, involving public and private actors from all over the European and Global context.

Some key comments on each of the session questions can be summarised as follows:

### How can Social and Environmental Responsibility help to upgrade the innovation capacity of existing enterprises? - Håkan Brynielsson, Regional Council of the County of Kalmar



So far CSR-issues have been treated very differently in different markets and industries. Many companies already meet high standards while others totally lack control of these questions. Developed countries clearly have an advantage in this area, but the CSR-landscape is very diverse.

Globalisation, global media and increased consumer power is changing all that. Global business will undoubtedly require global CSR-standards, such as those already existing on the global physical measurement systems, quality standards and environmental standards. The work carried out within the ERIK ACTION project is one of many, many existing components.

The potential rewards of good CSR are plentiful – increased competitiveness, increased brand value, reduced risk, healthier workforce etc. But the most important factor is within the workforce itself – released creativity and increased innovation capacity at all levels of the company.

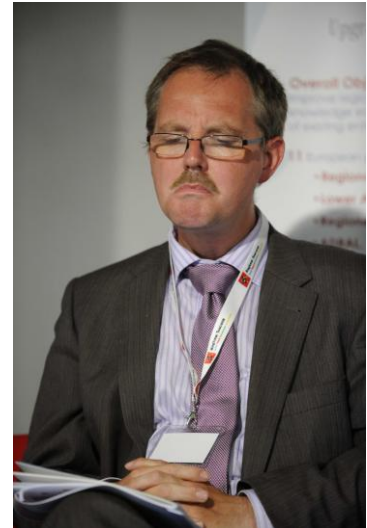
A company that is truly concerned with the well-being of their workforce is more attractive as an employer and will have more loyal staff. The relationship between the employer and the employee will be more bidirectional, thus releasing creativity and increasing the ability to change to meet new requirements.

In addition, a CSR-oriented company will be more efficient in recognising and cooperating global suppliers, who work in a similar manner. In this way there is mutual benefit from each others' innovation capacity.

**What challenges do you face in the field of Social and Environmental Responsibility and how can interregional/national cooperation help? – Bernard de Potter, Enterprise Flanders**

The concept of CSR remains vague, ambiguous and multidimensional. Traditional implementation of CSR strategies does not always achieve the desired results. At this moment there is still insufficient information about the business benefits of CSR implementation.

Effective implementation of CSR involves active engagement of the public sector, capacity building, empowerment of the workers, development of standards and harmonizing them with the firm's goals and objectives, ongoing research, removal of economic barriers to CSR, etc. Public sector engagement involves host government actions as well as home country government. They must build a sustainable relationship so as to promote CSR. In order to harmonize standards, care must be taken to address implementation guidelines, training and education, sharing of information, and monitoring of procedures.



**What lessons has your region learned from the ERIK ACTION project on the theme of Social and Environmental Responsibility? Giuseppina De Lorenzo, Regione Toscana**

In the ERIK ACTION Project, the Regione Toscana was an exporting region. This means that we offered our existing good practice, Fabrica Ethica, to other project partners for transfer. Therefore the process began as a one way transfer from Regione Toscana to the others.



However, the main lesson coming from the ERIK ACTION project, is that this experience, rather than a mono-lateral teaching, became a sharing process by which all the parties involved had some experience on supporting SMEs in CSR processes or awarding responsible SMEs in public procurement tenders, for example.

CSR is being done differently in different European regions; several suggestions and strategies can come out of these experiences. Different approaches to CSR not necessarily linked to official standards such as certification. For example, Tuscany and Lower Austria were working on a similar project to develop regional guidelines for sustainability report of SMEs. Both project ideas have been enriched by this exchange.

Moreover, this could be a starting point for future collaborations on this field, maybe creating contacts among the SMEs that are implementing these instruments or extending further monitoring and testing activities.