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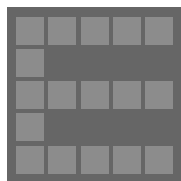
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ERIK: a New Opportunity for Knowledge-Based Regions to Co-operate

Dr. Elisabeth HELANDER, Director, Directorate-General for Regional Policy, European Commission.



I am delighted to have this chance to wish the ERIK network every success in its crucial role of providing support to regions seeking to improve their competitiveness. Among the key elements for successful regional development is a region's ability to acquire and apply knowledge and, especially, its capacity for innovation. To give regions a boost in these fields, the Commission has approved 126 regional programmes of innovative actions throughout all the EU Member States which focus on three strategic themes:

- *Regional technology and innovation*
- *E-Europe at the service of regional development*
- *Regional identity and sustainable development*

To complement these programmes and to encourage contacts between regions, three network programmes were also approved for ERDF co-funding by the Commission: ERIK is of course concerned with the first of the three themes, IANIS concerns the second theme and SUSTAINABLE REGIONS the third. The main objective of ERIK is to identify interesting ideas and good practices in the field of regional innovation and knowledge-based policies developed in the participating regions. This information will be available not only to policy makers in the EU but will also provide assistance to the Candidate Countries looking to benefit from experiences in the existing Member States.

I was pleased to learn that membership of ERIK is growing as more regions are linking up with the original 13 regions who manage the network which is co-ordinated by Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna. By focusing on the identification of new practices and

interesting ideas, ERIK will help regions to enhance knowledge transfer and technological innovation within firms be it processes, products or services. Improvement of the relationships between universities, RTD organisations and businesses is one of the most important objectives of the regional programmes and ERIK will be of vital support in helping regions to find new ways to stimulate innovation, creativity and quality in small and medium-sized enterprises. Support for clusters and networks of firms and the development of innovation services for firms are among the main topics of most interest to the regions.

We expect that ERIK will make a significant contribution to the increased use of knowledge and innovation in regional economies as highlighted by the Lisbon summit. Through its co-operation with the other two networks for the regional programmes and, indeed, with other related networks, we believe that ERIK will provide an essential input to the long-term improvement of social and economic development and cohesiveness in the regions of Europe. Once again, I wish ERIK every success in achieving its objectives and I look forward to working with you.

The Importance of Innovation in Regional Development Processes

Claudio Martini - President of Regione Toscana



In march 2000 the Lisbon European Council redrew regional development strategies assuming knowledge economy as one basic feature to trigger growth in local systems, improve social cohesion and increase attention to environmentally sustainable growth.

Integration between research and production should be pursued, to improve exploitation of research outcome as well as scientific and technological knowledge. Here, spontaneous interaction between players should not be relied upon, specially where no spur or warranty is present. Therefore, it is necessary that regions commit themselves to intense cooperation, interaction and shared responsibility among different players, both at the national and european level.

Firms - specially small and medium ones – though belonging to industrial districts, do not own enough

resources to support independent research. Therefore, they must rely on universities and research centers, as well as other european regions.

Sharing of results and experiences among european regions lays at the root of a new era of industrial policies for global development, making for both quality and sustainability. Competitiveness and sustainability do not elide each other. On the other hand, they may well integrate and complete each other where a strong investment in knowledge is present. Therefore, investing in the knowledge economy is the new paradigm for public policy.

Regional intervention should foster commitment and closeness among production and knowledge players in Europe, as suggested by the Lisbon European Council. Returns may be high in several ways: better circulation of ideas and methods; improved access to knowledge; increased agreements for research and innovation, as well as an overall improvement in technology transfer.

In this framework, such network projects as ERIK play a fundamental role, while ERIK's declared goal is to strengthen regional cohesion through sharing and exchanging knowledge, experiences and good practices among partners, thereby steering regional policies towards the knowledge economy.

It is for these reasons that the regional government of Tuscany is proud of working within the ERIK Network together with the other partners to spare no effort for its success.





The ERIK Network Project

Elisabetta Toschi, Erik Project Manager

Research, Technology Transfer and Innovation are of primary importance for both regional and global economic development. Trying to fill the gap among regions in the European Union is a *conditio sine qua non* to strengthen internal cohesion and foster regional innovation, identified as crucial objectives of the European Regional Policy.

In this wake, the innovative actions funded by the DG REGIO of the European Commission through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) may act as laboratories of ideas for lagging regions. As the opportunities for experimentation are often limited under mainstream Structural Funds, the innovative actions provide regional actors with the "risk space" needed to respond to meet the challenges set by the new economy.

During 2002-06, regional innovative actions programmes are launching and supporting measures relating to one or more of the three strategic themes:

- knowledge-based regional economies and technological innovation;
- e-EuropeRegion: the information society and regional

development;

- regional identity and sustainable development.

Moreover, the European Commission encourages and funds cooperation and experience-sharing among regions. Network projects are expected to strongly enhance transfer of good practices and emergence of new initiatives.

ERIK is the network of European Regions dealing with "Regional economies based on Knowledge and Technological Innovation". It has been created to sustain and further develop inter-regional networking and to provide network support to regions with approved ERDF Innovative Actions programmes. The network aims at improving cohesion through the sharing of information, experience and good practices among partners and to steer regional strategies towards knowledge oriented policies.

During the two years project life span (2003-2004), any region with an ERDF Innovative Actions Programme interested in participating in ERIK activities, is welcome to interact and become a member of the network.

The ERIK Network Members

The ERIK network has been founded by the Toscana and Emilia-Romagna regions, acting as leading regions, together with other 11 European regions.

1. Emilia Romagna (Italy)
2. Lombardia (Italy)
3. Toscana (Italy)
4. Nieder Österreich (Austria)
5. Wallonie (Belgium)
6. Basse Normandie (France)
7. Lorraine (France)
8. Bremen (Germany)
9. Thessaly (Greece)
10. Alentejo (Portugal)
11. Aragon (Spain)
12. Murcia (Spain)
13. West Midlands (United Kingdom)

The main scope of a network should be the sharing of information and practices with the largest number of interested actors. For this reason the enlargement of the ERIK network to other regions is our first objective. ERIK is still in its embryonic phase, but a number of regions have already expressed their interest in joining us, namely:

1. Flanders (Belgium)
2. Storstrøm (Denmark)
3. Brandenburg (Germany)
4. Sachsen (Germany)
5. Ionian Islands (Greece)
6. Sterea Ellada (Greece)
7. North Aegean (Greece)
8. Liguria (Italy)
9. Piemonte (Italy)
10. Valle d'Aosta (Italy)
11. East Netherland (Netherlands)
12. South Netherland (Netherlands)
13. Valencia (Spain)
14. La Rioja (Spain)
15. Extremadura (Spain)
16. Comunidad de Madrid (Spain)
17. Castilla-La Mancha (Spain)
18. Baleares (Spain)
19. Övre Norrland (Sweden)
20. Västra Götaland (Sweden)
21. Västerbotten (Sweden)
22. South East England (UK)

It is a pleasure to welcome them publicly in this first issue of the ERIK newsletter and we hope that this is just the start for a further enlargement of the network.

Actions within ERIK

The enhancement of innovation and knowledge oriented regional strategies is the overall objective of the ERIK network. This means:

- the benchmarking of good practices relating to innovation and knowledge policies;
- the identification of specific topics of common interest;
- the exchange of experiences from different regions and contexts;
- the extension of collaboration at interregional level among the different actors of the regional knowledge systems;
- the increase of the know-how of main regional actors as far as innovation, technology transfer and the promotion of knowledge economy are concerned;
- the identification and valorisation of different methodologies developed under EC programmes or other schemes;
- the exchange of information on the progresses of RPIAs led by network participants aiming at improving this instrument for the future;
- the co-operation with other related EU initiatives.

In order to meet these objectives the network has planned the following actions:

The Innovative Regions Policy Forum and the Conferences

The ERIK work-programme includes the organisation of two Conferences and one Policy Forum. These events will represent an opportunity for regional activists, experts and for the European Commission to exchange information and to debate issues of common interest. The 3 Innovative Actions networks, IANIS, Sustainable Regions and ERIK, are exploring the possibilities, where feasible, to hold either joint events or parallel events at the same location and time, with a view to maximising synergies between the respective memberships and maximising the visibility and promotion of the networks.

Four Workshops and Four Thematic Working Groups

The Thematic Working Groups represent an opportunity for EU regions to network and exchange information, best practices and experiences on specific topics. To this purpose, four Thematic Working Groups have been set up:

- *Clusters and business networks*
- *Regional innovation benchmarking and foresight*
- *Services and support to start-up and spin-off*
- *Science and industry relationship*

The results obtained by the Thematic Working Groups are shared during the realisation of specific workshops, where interested regions will be asked to



present their experiences.

Study Visits Exchange Programme

The programme enables ERIK Partners member regions willing to share good practices to learn from innovation and technology transfer experiences adopted by other regions.

Newsletters

Three newsletter issues are published each year and made available on-line via the ERIK Network website.

ERIK website

The ERIK website is already available at the following address: <http://www.eriknetwork.net>

The website contains information related to ERIK members and initiatives. It is constantly updated and will grow following the network progresses and results.

The website will soon be enriched through the development of a database that will represent the ERIK network knowledge tank containing Good Practices, Innovative Schemes and Case Studies coming from all over Europe.



A General Survey of the Technological Innovation Theme within European RPIAs

The technological innovation theme consumes the biggest share of the RPIA budget among the three strategic themes chosen by the European Commission. This proves that European regions consider technological innovation as a priority in their development policies. The shares of the three themes in an overall budget of RPIA (including technical assistance and accompanying measures) are as follows:

- Technological Innovation 44,6 %
- E-Europe 37,2 %
- Regional Identity 12,5 %
- Technical assistance 4,3%
- Accompanying measure 1,3%

As regards spending for technological innovation Italy records the highest amount with 45,17 mln euros, followed by Austria (29,63), Spain (24,15), Sweden (23,55), United Kingdom (22,31), Germany (21,91), Netherlands (16,08), France (14,17), Portugal (12,37), Finland (4,73), Ireland (4,01), Denmark (2,90), Luxembourg (2,07).

Most frequently chosen measures within Technological

Innovation RPIAs rank as follows:

- Clusters and business networks (29% of RPIA's budget);
- SMEs innovation projects with Universities and technology centres (21%);
- Business advisory services - technology forecasting and technology audits in SMEs (19%);
- Shared business services - incubator units and creation of technology based firms (15%)

The following are less popular measures (below 10% of RPIA's budget):

- Other research, technological development and innovation projects (9%),
- Innovation of financial engineering (5%),
- Research, Technological development and innovation of infrastructure (2%)

Such general data show that measures related to clusters and business networks are currently the most frequently chosen measures by the EU regions in the field of technological innovation.

Clusters and business networks

The most used actions within this largest subtheme are:

- stimulation of a demand for R&D projects in SMEs (e.g. South East – Ireland; Murcia – Spain; Steiermark – Austria); studies on innovation financing and guidelines for SMEs and policy makers regarding innovation support schemes (e.g. Sachsen – Germany; Emilia Romagna and Marche – Italy; Sydsverige – Sweden);
- optimisation of the existing supplies offered by university and research centres (e.g. Central

Macedonia , Castilla y Leon; Murcia; Lombardia; UK Eastern and South East of Ireland);

- projects between universities and technology centres (Steiermark; Marche; Puglia; Madeira; Sydsverige; Murcia and Irish South East region; Castilla y Leon; Central Macedonia).

This is the only sub-theme chosen by all the countries participating in RPIA – among which the most involved countries are Italy, Spain and Greece.

SMEs innovation projects with universities and technology centres

For the second biggest sub-theme the types of action are:

- stimulation of a demand for R&D projects in SMEs (e.g. South East Ireland; Murcia; Steiermark); innovation financing and guidelines for SMEs and policy makers regarding innovation support schemes (e.g. Sachsen; Emilia Romagna and Marche; Sydsverige);
- optimisation of the existing supply offered by universities and R&D organisations (Central Macedonia; Castilla y Leon; Murcia; Lombardia; UK Eastern and

Castilla y Leon; Murcia; Lombardia; UK Eastern and South East of Ireland);- projects between universities and technology centres/SMEs (e.g. Steiermark; Marche; Puglia; Maderiera; Sydsverige).

Here there is no clear regional concentration: Spanish regions have the biggest number of actions, Swedish regions have the biggest budget. Ireland is over-represented, inasmuch as all Irish regions work in this field (60% of all Irish actions).

Business Advisory Services

The 19% of the total budget for technological innovation actions is constituted by Business advisory services. Their types of actions are:

- foresight and economic intelligence services and diffusion activities for foresight, as well as creation of regional observatories (e.g. Asturias; Lorraine; Luxembourg; Central Macedonia; Wales; Lombardia; Puglia);
- development of innovation indicators within firms (Murcia);
- training in innovation management and management and entrepreneurship skills (e.g. Central Macedonia; Östra Mellansverige);
- technology audits and 'clinics', implementation of

technology plans in SMEs, technology support and mentoring in firms (e.g. Central Macedonia; Murcia; Lisboa; UK Eastern regions; Wales);

- ICT audits and ICT strategies in firms (Pays de la Loire; Campania);
- awareness campaigns on entrepreneurship and innovation, stimulation of IPR and technology owners (e.g. Lisboa; Yorkshire);
- improvement of the visibility of supply and demand for innovation in specific sectors (e.g. Portuguese Norte Region).

The mostly involved countries are Spain, Greece, Italy and France. The UK is also strongly represented.

Shared Business services

Shared Business services represent 15% of spending within the theme. Related actions are:

- supporting spin-offs from universities and R&D organisations as well as spin-outs from existing firms; raising awareness on innovation, prototyping, tutoring and the provision of managerial and technological support to entrepreneurs; design of new incubator units;

RPIA helped in a number of cases with the sectorial diversification efforts.

These types of services/actions are used more intensely in Austria, Germany and Netherlands.

Innovation financial engineering: seed and venture capital

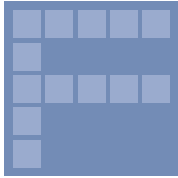
5% of the total budget is covered by financial Engineering Innovation (venture capital). The types of action which characterize the venture capital are:

- creation of new financial instruments, such as: seed capital fund starting (Vienna); - mutual guarantee system on the basis of previous experiences of other regions (Smaland); - financial solution for internationalization of firms with special interest in e.g. international credits, electronic payments, secure platforms for e-commerce (Galicia); - creation of a group of regions interested in creating a joint fund for transnational technology

transfer (Asturias);

- support for the selection of projects: - creation of a network of financiers (Vienna); - an "Idea fund" created to identify pre-competitive projects at a pre-seed stage (Hamburg);

- financial advice to firms: - advice is given, including on-line consultancy, on existing financial instruments and financial management in firms (Galicia); change of attitudes towards innovation financing (Swedish region of Mellersta Norrland). This subtheme is less chosen by the EU regions.



Regional Innovation Strategies (RIS): a tool to improve social capital and institutional efficiency?

Mikel Landabaso, Bénédicte Mouton and Michal Miedzinski, European Commission - DG Regional Policy

The importance of social capital for regional development and innovation

From the regional development point of view, social capital can be defined as the collective capacity of key socio-economic players in the region (e.g. individuals, companies, authorities, research centres, business support agencies, etc.) to form and effectively use formal or informal networks, or other forms of cooperation, with a view of enhancing the regional development process. Such networks are based on a shared value system, norms and institutions, such as trust and reciprocity.

In the field of innovation policy social capital plays

a vital role in improving regional innovation systems that facilitate both learning processes and generation, diffusion and effective use of knowledge. An effective innovation system bears fruit in the form of new or improved products, processes or services.

The importance of regional networks was confirmed by numerous studies. As an example, the Community Innovation Survey (EU Commission 2000) shows that the most innovative regions in Europe are the ones with a high level of cooperation between main regional players.

Social capital dimension in RIS: lessons learned

The objective of RIS, launched in over 30 regions from a dozen of different European countries, was to "promote the creation or strengthening of regional innovation systems in order to increase regional competitiveness". When we look at its results and impact, RIS showed that effective regional innovation policies need to be based on inclusive iterative processes involving key public and private actors of the region (EU Commission 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001). It can be said that RIS - with its focus on creating or restoring the public-private relationships and institutions used for generation of knowledge and innovation - was conducive to fostering social capital in the region.

In case of less successful examples of RIS, weak regional partnerships between public and private actors appear to be the main failure factor. Limited social capital tended to have a negative impact on regional innovation policies in general. The following were the most common failure factors for RIS:

at the political level:

- regional authorities feeling threatened by an inclusive, transparent and bottom-up process;
- regional authorities feeling threatened by the results of the innovation supply analysis and the evident mismatch between their policies and the SME innovation demand (this often led to a limited diffusion of the diagnosis done in the RIS, preventing firms, which are the end target, to accept and share this diagnosis);
- regional authorities not willing to take into account and 'mainstream' the ideas and projects stemming

from the RIS strategy into ERDF operational programmes;

. existing R&TDI institutions feeling threatened by the RIS process and conclusions, and reluctant to change;

at the operational level:

. failure to find the 'regional champions' and/or high-level RIS management which could set the networking process in motion, by providing political leadership and creating awareness and involvement of the appropriate regional actors;

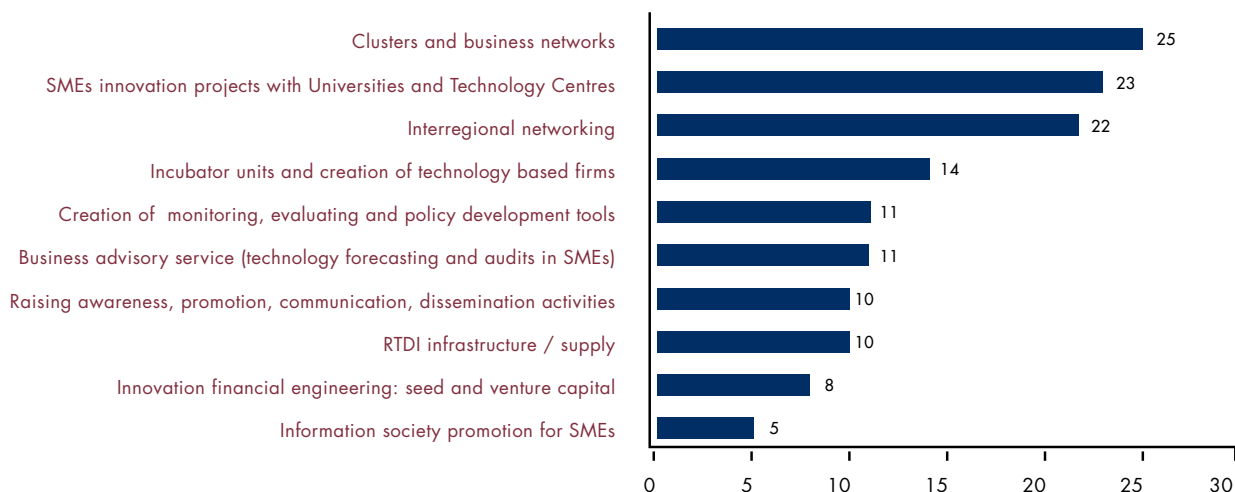
- failure to keep the 'regional champion'/management team and the networking process in motion over time;

- over reliance on external consultants for the development of the strategy and action plan without any consultation and appropriation of the local actors;

- an excessive technology-push perspective without sufficient consideration to a demand-led perspective, and absence of an adequate understanding of the functioning of the regional innovation system and its weaknesses.

- a 'study' approach rather than an 'applied' practical one - discouraging participation of action-oriented local partners, most notably business;

Fig. 1 - Nbr of actions in RIS/RIS+ - 1998-20021



Also in terms of the formal content of RIS programmes the social capital dimension appeared to be very important. The greatest number of activities launched by the regions dealt with clusters and networks of firms (see figure 1, for the 30 RIS and RIS+ co-financed by innovative actions of ERDF between 1998-2002). This

tendency has been confirmed in the new generation of regional innovative actions programmes (PRAI). In 2001, 'clusters and business networks' was also the largest category of actions in the field of technological innovation. In total, more than 46 million euros are being spent specifically on clusters by 30 regions.

Policy considerations

Strong evidence for a crucial role of social capital in regional performance should impact on the priorities and measures of regional development policies. In fact, recent regional policy approaches consider various forms of regional cooperation (both inter-firm and private-public) fundamental for improving international competitiveness of the regional economy. This is largely due to the systemic way in which the regional innovation process takes place: cooperate locally to be able to innovate in order to compete globally.

RIS was an attempt to provide a framework for direct involvement, collaboration and collective action of private and public regional actors in order to exploit synergies and liberate latent energies and creativity, that have always been at the root of economic renewal. Nevertheless, a question remains on how can these new "soft" policy measures aimed at social capital bring about a real change in the less favoured regions? How can they be used to create interactions and bonds that evolve into efficiently working regional innovation systems where such systems have never existed?

In this context, three examples of actions can be suggested for regional innovation policies on the basis of experience from RIS:



Improve regional public private partnerships for innovation policy

The participation of private sector representatives in the decision making process of innovation policies should be stimulated. This can be done through the creation of regional innovation fora and working groups with representatives from both private and public sectors. The link between SMEs and the regional 'knowledge base' should be a key priority for regional innovation policies. This can be made by improving access to knowledge for regional SMEs, developing networks between universities and technology centres, to make the supply more efficient and accessible to firms and by developing an intellectual property rights policy.

Stimulate the creation of innovation driven clusters and business networks in the regions

For the less favoured regions, this can take the form, for instance, of awareness campaigns tailored to regional firms and policy makers about the added value of innovation driven clusters. Demand analysis of firms and other relevant actors should be carried out in order to address the collective needs in a coordinated way. Collective activities should be developed in clusters, such as technology watch, technology transfer and acquisition, design, marketing, etc. This can go up to joint production and shared R&D activities in some cases.

Improve indicators and methodologies to measure and understand social capital dimension at regional level

Even basic data on innovation at regional level is still

unavailable - e.g. only 7 indicators of the Innovation Scoreboard (EU Commission, 2002) out of 17 in total are available at this stage for the regional level (e.g. regarding population with higher education, life long learning, employment in high/mid-tech industry and in high tech services, R&TDI expenditure and patents). These indicators focus on inputs and outputs of R&D and technology, leaving aside more subtle issues such as e.g. quality of social capital. Meanwhile, RIS proved that in-depth knowledge of the factual social and economic situation of the region is a prerequisite for formulation and implementation of any regional innovation policy. Conclusion: new indicators should be developed.

There is also a need to develop methodologies to learn and diffuse good practices developed by the regions. RIS generated a number of good practices as regards formulation and implementation of regional innovation policies. Creation of regularly updated databases as well as arranging networking and mentoring activities among regions can support an exchange of this experience.

It has to be emphasised, however, that each RIS is highly context-dependent, not only in terms of economic and innovation regional performance, but also as far as governance and social capital is concerned. It certainly doesn't mean we cannot learn from experience of other regions. It means learning from RIS is not a repetitive process. Choosing a right methodology for a case requires a careful analysis of the local situation and knowledge of other regional contexts.

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INNOVARAGON, Regional Programme of Innovative Actions of Aragon 2002-2003

Oscar Pascual, Instituto Tecnológico de Aragon

The ambition of Europe is to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world by the year 2010. One of the most important tools needed to achieve this goal is to promote innovation as the main source of benefit for SMEs.

Innovation means to create new products and new services, as well as to improve production and management. These are key factors to modernise SMEs, improve their markets and develop society in the end.

For Aragon, a sparsely populated region, innovation is crucial for achieving prosperity in the future.

The growing internationalisation of economy makes constant innovation necessary for SMEs and institutions to survive - something they cannot achieve on their own, because innovation requires teamwork, co-operation with other actors and partnerships between companies. This is the spirit of InnovAragón, a joint project between the Government of Aragon and the European Union, under the Innovative Actions initiative, which aims at meeting the challenge of stimulating innovation among companies in our region.

This project, which is already a reality, can be defined by **four measures**:

- **PLASEC**, Sectoral Platforms, aims at bringing together companies from the same productive sector in order to analyse common needs, design strategies and to optimise their resources, thereby making them more competitive.

Nearly a hundred Aragonese companies have already joined this initiative, which is currently headed by nine sectoral platforms.

- **COOPERA** is a plan aimed at promoting collaboration among universities, research and development centres and SMEs.

This programme has encouraged a high number of private companies, technology centres and university departments from the region to create the first four research groups between companies and institutes. Furthermore, a total of ten innovative projects featuring small and medium-sized companies and representatives from the science and technology area have been created.

- The aim of **LABORA** is to take advantage of the potential offered by new information technologies in order to create new jobs and SMEs, particularly in rural areas.

rural areas.

LABORA is already fully operational, through a service centre that allows companies and teleworkers to be linked, enabling both to carry out their work from anywhere in Aragón. LABORA looks to build up the potential of rural area telecentres in order to generate jobs and economic activity in sectors such as publishing, data base creation and maintenance, web page design, accounting, translation and telesecretarial work, amongst others.

- Finally, **REDES** is a plan of action focused on participating in different European networks in order to promote collaboration and the exchange of experiences so as to promote technological innovation amongst small and medium-sized enterprises.

The **Regional Programme of Innovative Actions - InnovAragón**, is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the regional government. It forms part of an innovation support plan to which projects such as RIS, RIS+, Walqa and the Regional Innovation Plan also belong.

This programme develops strategic links that are considered to be, both by the European Union and the Government of Aragón, essential for our future growth, a regional economy based on technological knowledge and innovation, an information society to serve regional development.

InnovAragón aims at playing a permanently active role in our society in order to create an authentic innovation culture.



More information at:
<http://www.ita.es/innovaragon>

Thessaly the Innovative Region: a Strategy Description

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Thessaly current position in innovation

Thessaly actually holds a leading position among the Greek regions in terms of social mobilisation, promotion, and support for innovation.

Thessaly four-year innovation strategy sought to provide a framework to address innovation policy issues in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. It is derived from the following needs (identified at the end of the RIS initiative) to effectively move ideas to prosperity (i.e., the innovation cycle):

1. Identify fragmented streams of innovation activities which could be coalesced with a new common innovation framework;
2. Define the collaborative framework of shared prosperity;
3. Suggest a blueprint for a dialogue, which may chart a direction toward the emerging 'world trade of ideas'.

Thessaly's future. A world class of ideas into innovative actions

The next step forward is the synchronization of regional innovation resources into a compound effort that incorporates generation of ideas funding, regional support and policies in order to facilitate the innovation mechanisms in Thessaly. This synchronization process has to take a deliberate and systematic effort in order to:

- Upgrade the human resources depository in the region
- Empower the innovation process inside SMEs with pilot actions

This compound effort should result in a fast forward process that will cut down the time needed from idea generation to new product development.

- Retooling the innovation process with on-line tools

Thessaly comprehensive strategy

"New product development" is a critical aspect of Thessaly innovation system. therefore the strategy has formulated a cohesive approach to ensure that this aim becomes apparent to SMEs supported by sectoral organizational mechanisms and regional policies.

The steering committee of the innovation programmes in close collaboration with the Regional Development Fund (RDF) is gaining the support of the regional authorities to fund pilot actions that are close to the market.

Academics, government officials, industrial executives and non-profit practitioners may all participate in this community of innovation practice. With this in mind, a three-dimensional transformation matrix can be applied. This includes the activities that can be mapped according to the different economic levels, as well as the three elements of the architecture: regional, behavioral and technological.

Main objectives and added-value indicators are: (1) the application of innovative practices for product

development and marketing, (2) the creation of regional support structures for new product development, and (3) the building of regional awareness with demonstration and dissemination actions on new product development. In this framework, the present proposal of the Region of Thessaly for the Innovative Actions Programme comes to enhance company networks, clusters, and academia-business links leading to the adoption of methods and technologies useful in new product development. The strategy focuses on New Product Development by Thessalian companies, and the main objective is to improve the capability of regional companies "to create and market".

The regional RIS+ theme is directed towards a sustainable and competitive economy, which will improve the living and working environment of Thessaly inhabitants.

The proposed strategy and pilot actions are based on the combination of the two RIS+ themes proposed by the Commission and covers all the productive sectors of

the Region: the primary sector with emphasis on bio-products and biological production methods; manufacturing with the creation of new product-led clusters and industrial design centres; and the tertiary sector with emphasis on culture-based and ecological tourism.

From the overall process of new product development, our strategy pursues two aims:

- the improvement of external conditions and the regional institutional environment for the creation of new products by local companies with the support of intermediary agencies, and
- the diffusion of new product models to a large number of regional companies belonging to the sectors of agriculture, manufacturing, and tourism.

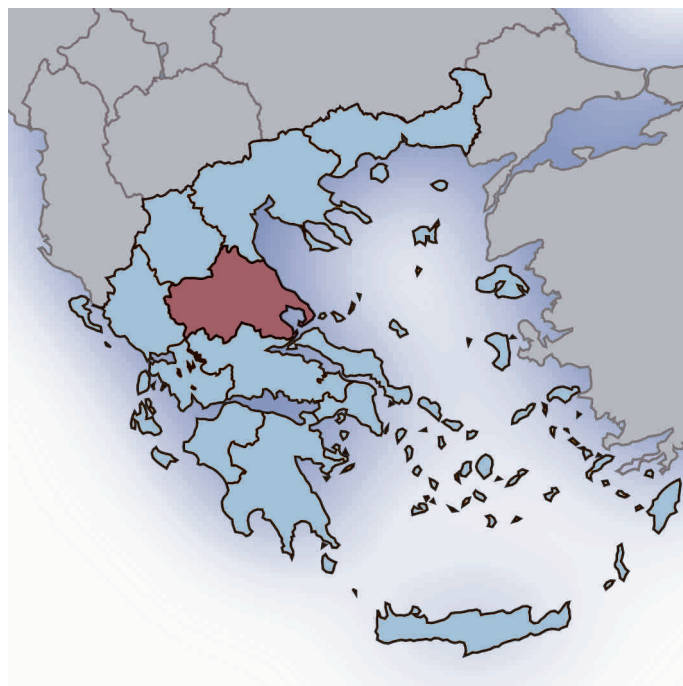
The application of innovative practices for product development will cover the sectors of manufacturing, services and tourism. The aim is to develop locally a series of valid practices for new product development.

The creation of regional support structures promoting product innovation and development has both horizontal and vertical dimensions:

- The creation of one Regional Innovation Support Centre
- The creation of one Industrial Design Centre aims at covering the needs of manufacturing for product development support.

Demonstration and dissemination of new product models and practices

Overall, the objective is to show concrete cases of good practice on new product development and to transfer them to the largest possible number of regional firms. If successful, the same practices will be further supported by the Regional Operational Programme of Thessaly and other relevant Community initiatives.



More information at:
<http://www.innothessaly.gr/>

on the next NEWSLETTER

FOCUS ON:

Bremen RPIA

West Midlands RPIA



News

European Commission announces competition for Regional Innovation Awards

The European Commission will grant awards for the most innovative projects implemented by regions in the framework of Regional Programs of Innovative Actions (RPIA). Main objective of the competition is to identify good innovative practices in regional development, raise awareness of such measures among regional policy makers and facilitate an exchange of experience between regions.

The jury chaired by Antonio Guterres, Portuguese ex-prime minister, will select the most interesting projects representing the three RPIA strategic themes, i.e., Knowledge-Based Economy, Information Society and Sustainable Development. Submitted projects will be assessed on the basis of their innovativeness, potential impact on regional economy, duration, impact on building partnerships as well as the possibility of transferring good practices to other regions (transferability). Nine nominated regions (three per each theme) will present their projects to the jury in Brussels. Finalists will be invited to the Regional Innovation Award ceremony that will take place in Brussels during a plenary session of the Committee of Regions in April 2004. The awards will be handed to the representatives of regions by Michel Barnier, the Commissioner responsible for regional policy.

The dead line for applications is 31 October 2003. Each region can submit only one project. For further information please consult DG Regional Policy website at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/innovation/concours_en.htm

ERIK's Office to be Inaugurated in Brussels

ERIK Brussels Office will be inaugurated on October 6th 2003 at 5.30 p.m. in Rond Point Schumann 6, Bruxelles. At this time a short presentation of ERIK's activities and objectives will be held, as well as a short tour of ERIK's office and facilities. Regional and EU representatives are all welcome to participate. At the end of the event all may enjoy the cocktail party, too.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for any further information at:
info@eriknetwork.net

ERIK, IANIS and Sustainable Regions sign a Memorandum of Co-operation

On the 10th of September, 2003 in Brussels on the occasion of the co-ordination meeting of the three Innovative Actions Networks (ERIK, IANIS and Sustainable development) a Memorandum of Co-operation has been signed by the three networks.

The Memorandum aims - whenever feasible - at: sharing information about programmes, coordinating activities, promoting each other among members and on websites, disseminating each other's results and knowledge, participating in each other's events, etc.

To achieve the aforementioned aims the three network programmes will regularly communicate and occasionally meet to plan and undertake concrete action in order to promote each other, share information for better coordination of activities and initiatives, help and support each other in the organization of events, possibly hold joint initiatives to maximize synergy, jointly contribute to european regional policy development and exploit opportunities to improve use of structural funds for regional development, etc.

International Conference on "Entrepreneurship & Business Incubation" and ERIK study visit in Bremen

The International Conference on "Entrepreneurship and Business Incubation - Strengthening the Regional Innovation Profile", will take place on the 15th - 17th October 2003 in Bremen, Germany. The conference will provide a platform for an international exchange of good practice tools concerning successful entrepreneurial concepts and instruments to foster innovative activities in SMEs and in the region. The coming together of various entrepreneurs, managers, scientists and politicians sharing a common interest and commitment in entrepreneurship building underlines the value of the meeting in Bremen.

Main concern of the conference is to discuss findings of the IRE-network "Strengthening the Regional Innovation Profile" with specific focus on the following key topics:

- regional benchmarking and company benchmarking - state of the art
- business incubation and technology centres, including how to attract young firms building at universities and within companies.

In addition to the conference there will be a study visit of the Technology Park Bremen and the "mobile solutions" cluster, which is performed in collaboration with the ERIK-thematic working group "Clusters". Topics in this context are:

- BITZ. Bremer Innovations- und Technologiezentrum
- Pre-Seed-Program for Academic Start-Ups
- t.i.m.e. programme (www.bremen-in-time.de)
- cluster "mobile solution group" (www.mobile-solution-group.de)
- Mobile Solution Center

Documents for registration can be found on the following website: www.strinnop.net.

The participation fee is 58 euro. The conference language is English. The closing date for application is 9.10.03.

Contact: Conny Hamann, Tel.: +49 421 9600 323, hamann@bia-bremen.de

Date: 16.-17.10.03 & Study Visit: 15.10.03 afternoon

Erik Workshop on "Regional Innovation, Benchmarking and Foresight"

The second Erik Workshop is planned to take place in Larissa (Thessaly, Greece) in January 2004 and will focus on "Regional Innovation, Benchmarking and Foresight".

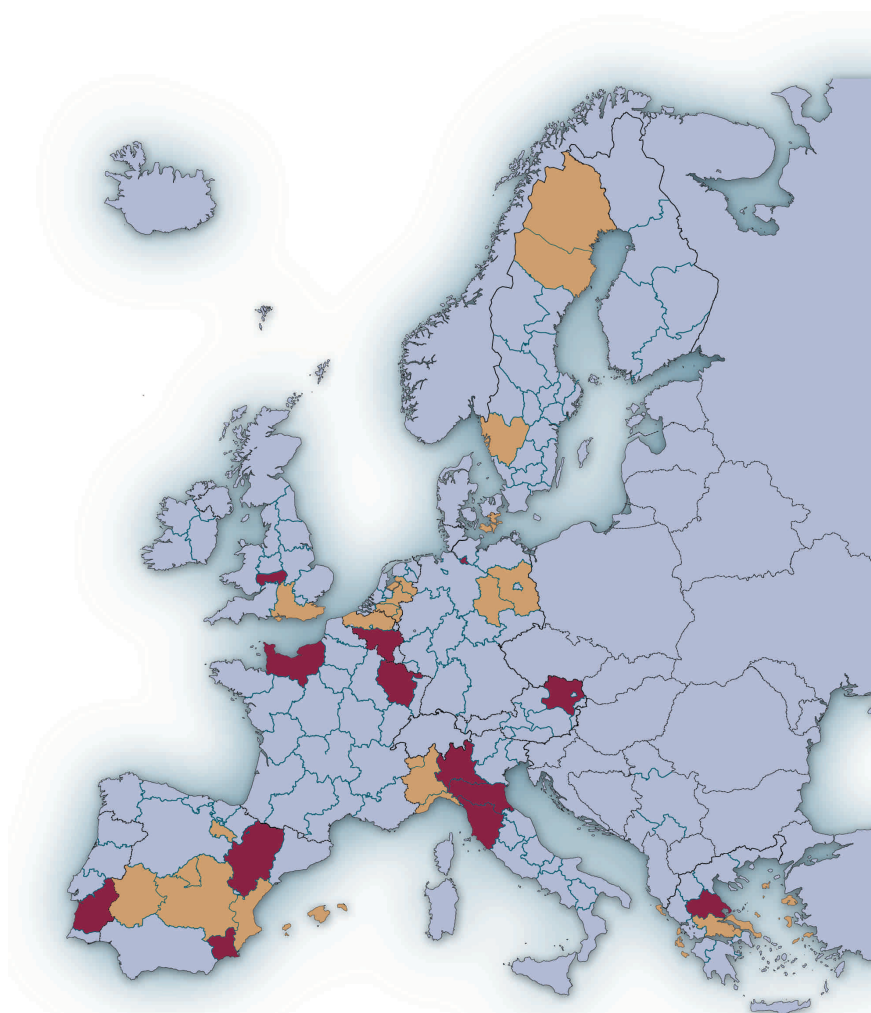
The programme of the workshop will be shortly available on the ERIK website.

Seminar on Competitive Regions and Best Practices

A Seminar in Sheffield, South Yorkshire, UK on the 9th and 10th October 2003 will take place on the theme "Competitive Regions - Shaping Best Practice". The venue of the event is at Holiday Inn, Royal Victoria Hotel. Throughout the conference an exhibition will be available for delegates to see examples of the UK use of Structural Funds to improve regional competitiveness. The programme draft is available at: http://europa.eu.int/comm/regional_policy/sources/docconf/sheffield2003/program_en.pdf

Closing Forum of Murcia Regional Programme of Innovative Actions

A technological forum is being organized in Murcia. The Opening Session of the Forum will be held by Murcia Regional Minister as well as one EC representative in charge of Innovative Actions. The event will take place on October 29th at the Auditorium and Centre of Congress of the Region of Murcia, and will bring together the main actors and company representatives that have taken part in the Regional Programme of Innovative Actions of the Murcia Region. At this time, the main conclusions and results of the Regional Programme of Innovative Actions will be presented. For further information please contact: franciscod.gallego@info.carm.es



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