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Innovation Networks and the New Programming Period

Ernest Gabmann

Regional minister for economy, technology and tourism and Deputy Prime Minister, Lower Austria

Knowledge and Innovation as Economic Drivers

Knowledge and innovation are fast becoming the most important production factors in European regional economies. The creation of new knowledge is a necessary prerequisite for regional economic, social or ecological prosperity, but alone it is not a sufficient condition. Only by exploiting new and existing knowledge through links with innovation can a positive, concrete impact be assured. Thus, regional economic and innovation policy must support the core activities of: new knowledge creation, existing knowledge interlinking and innovation implementation.

Regional Networking for Regional Innovation Systems

For around 15 years European regions have been placing emphasis on systematic development and implementation of European Commission supported regional innovation strategies through the RITTS/RIS and RPIA. Here we find the above mentioned "core activities". We see regional bodies in charge of innovation policy striving to create knowledge and transparency in regional firms' abilities, innovation support needs and opinions on existing innovation support services. We observe consensus building among actors in the regional innovation system, linking complementary abilities or resources to the innovation supply chain according to innovation needs and processes. This leads to improved innovation strategies based on real, identified needs and future opportunities.

So regional networking, combined with concrete action, is acknowledged as a success factor in innovation policy. But what about the interregional level?

The new dimension of inter-regional networking in innovation

Networking among RITTS/RIS regions started in the mid 1990s in an infrequent, informal manner. Over the last programming period several formal networks focusing on interregional exchange of experiences and good practices in the field of innovation and innovation support, among which the ERIK Network, were established by the European Commission. ERIK members have benefited from this by learning from other regions' established concepts or tools which could be applied to their own regional innovation system. However, these networks do not usually include joint operational transfer of the identified concept or tool. For this action, some ERIK members have gained additional experiences in, for example, trans-regional innovation projects (TRIP), which see the joint transfer of established

concepts or tools from one to one or many other regions, taking into consideration particular aspects of the unique regional framework.

Regarding the new operational programmes, added value could be found in a merged approach of the RPIA and ERIK strategy with joint inter-regional transfer. This represents an appropriate methodology for continued implementation of experimental innovative actions for, on the one hand, knowledge and technological innovation and, on the other, effective transfer and dissemination of successfully implemented actions. This approach again links the 3 "core activities" and is the consequent up-scaling from an established regional level methodology towards an inter-regional dimension. Practical implementation could see the construction of formal networks, based around small working groups, concentrating on dissemination/transfer of results of the RPIA but with an ultimate focus of implementing experimental actions or joint inter-regional transfer of good practices.

This approach is compatible with the European Commission initiative "Regions for Economic Change" which aims to make regional and urban networks more dynamic, to test innovative ideas and to incorporate them into mainstream programmes. Lower Austria, along with the ERIK member regions, welcomes this initiative and looks forward to a new dimension of opportunities for inter-regional networking within this initiative.



Ernest Gabmann
Regional Minister for Economy, Technology and Tourism
and Deputy Prime Minister, Lower Austria



Exchange of good practice continues and intensifies in 2007-2013

Veronica Gaffey
Head of Unit - Innovative Actions, DG Regional Policy, European Commission

Cohesion Policy is the most important financial instrument promoting the Lisbon agenda. It contributes to the growth and better jobs agenda in the regulatory framework provided by Community Strategic Guidelines, the Structural Funds regulations and the earmarking of resources.

To complete and strengthen political and financial effort towards growth and job creation, DG REGIO has decided to reshape communication and interregional cooperation activities, focusing them on good practice exchange between regions and on how results can improve mainstream programmes. Thus, the new initiative Regions for Economic Change was launched with a Commission Communication on the 8th November 2006. For ERIK network members, this initiative is of great interest as it represents the framework under which they can continue their work. Regions for Economic Change works through the Territorial Cooperation objective and two existing mechanisms for interregional cooperation and urban development, but introduces some interesting novelties.

The thematic priorities

While regions and cities will continue to have the possibility to form and manage their own networks, the Commission has drawn up a list of 30 priority themes around which interregional partnerships could be developed, such as bringing innovative ideas to the market, moving to a low carbon economy, improving regional capacity for research and innovation, bringing e-government to regions and business, etc. These themes are closely linked to the economic modernisation agenda and the topics raised by the ERIK working groups over the last 4 years.

A "fast track option"

The Commission will proactively establish networks on these selected priority themes in order to provide a rapid testing ground for new policy ideas. For these networks the Commission will play a coordination role ensuring ongoing technical support and administrative back-up.

A two-way bridge

RfEC is about partnership in action. Past experience shows that too often the results of cooperation projects or pilots schemes remained confidential and were not widely transposed into mainstream European level programmes. This initiative introduces a new mechanism to strengthen the dissemination of good practices throughout the Union and into operation programmes of regions participating in the

networks. In this regard it worth recalling the recent publication "Innovative Strategies and actions – Results from 15 years of experimentation" which provides practical guidance for regions to learn from other regions' experience when implementing their regional innovation strategies.

Better communication

A more coordinated and focused effort is necessary to ensure a wide dissemination of ideas and results and to promote the added value of regional policy to achieving the Lisbon Objectives. This process will be supported by the organisation of an annual RfEC conference associated to the spring European Council, dedicated to the growth and jobs agenda. During the first of these events (7-8 March 2007) a new website containing thematic publications, case studies analysis and good practices examples will be presented. Network results and on-going programmes will constantly feed this website.

Last but not least, annual innovation awards, RegioStars, will be launched to highlight successful projects and stimulate the exchange of experience and the overall visibility of Regional Policy. Case studies of the best projects submitted for the RegioStars competition will be published annually.

ERIK network member regions already know how difficult but important it is to share knowledge and to build common ground to face the current and future challenges of globalisation for European citizens. I hope you will participate in the Region for Economic Change initiative and that you will contribute to its success with your precious experience.



Veronica Gaffey
Head of Unit - Innovative Actions
DG Regional Policy, European Commission



Developing a Regional Innovation Strategy: "BaBy RIS" in Banská Bystrica

Veronika Jacekova
Banská Bystrica Self - Governing Region, Slovak Republic



Banská Bystrica region was once well known as a region with a tradition of research and development. However, due to the transformation processes undergone in the Slovak Republic since 1989, the research and development base has been weakened in terms of workforce and technical capacities, leading to an almost complete disappearance of the entrepreneurial R&D base.

By the end of the 1990's, in line with the EU Lisbon strategy and with international trends, Slovakia has also identified innovation and R&D as key driving forces behind sustainable development. Hence, representatives of the regional government have "jumped on the innovative bandwagon" and initiated the Banská Bystrica Regional Innovation Strategy project "BaBy RIS", financed by the European Commission within FP 6.

The overall goal of BaBy RIS is creation of a fruitful environment for innovation and entrepreneurship in order to provide the region with sustainable economic growth and to raise its level of welfare. Thus, the specific core objectives of BaBy RIS are:

- raising awareness on "entrepreneurial and innovation thinking";
- identification of key regional industries in order to provide high-quality long-term jobs with equal chances for both genders;
- creation of networks and partnerships to enhance information flow, technology transfer and the diffusion of knowledge in the region;
- creation of supporting infrastructure for innovation development and the incorporation of regional governance into the innovation process.

All existing regional institutions and organisations were involved in the first phase of the project and integrated into a collaborative network to reduce redundancies and make extensive use of synergy effects. Moreover, the project developed a framework for the cross fertilisation of ideas and the transfer of strategies and models of good practices to Banská Bystrica region from its EU partner regions of Abruzzo, South Estonia and Nitra.

In the second phase, BaBy RIS placed special emphasis on the needs of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), through actions facilitating the development of a co-ordinated innovation-friendly environment. This included the analysis of SMEs' needs, of the regional innovation supply (identification of regional research and technological development structures), identification of the regional

support services for enterprises and gaps between regional demand and existing regional supply.

Translating the results of BaBy RIS research and analysis phase into a strategic document and subsequently into an Action plan is one of the main activities of the third stage, which is about to be launched. The Action plan should provide a list of measures and supporting pilot actions which help to increase industrial competitiveness in Banská Bystrica. The key action is the creation of innovation support infrastructure, financed jointly by EU Structural funds and by other European programmes and initiatives.

The starting point for the development of infrastructure facilitating innovative companies will be a Centre for Entrepreneurship & Innovation Support that will provide science and technological services, services in the field of industrial research & development, support during planning and start-up of SME development activities, professional training for R&D managers and technological staff, and a database of technical, economical and legal experts. The Centre, which should be open at the beginning of 2008, will also be active in promoting international cooperation, such as that already underway in the project itself and through participation in networks such as ERIK.

For more information see: www.babyris.sk, or contact Veronika Jacekova, The Office of Banská Bystrica Self - governing Region, vjacekova@vucbb.sk, +421 48 4722 124





Intelligent Consultation Bremen's "Mittelstandsoffensive" (Initiative for SMEs)

Telse Jochims
BIG Bremen Investment Agency

Bremen's "Mittelstandsoffensive" (Initiative for SMEs) has been extended until the end of 2008. This cooperation project between the federal state of Bremen and Deutsche Telekom AG (German Telecom) supports SMEs in implementing new ICT applications. The project particularly targets SMEs that are unfamiliar with innovative ICT applications.

In order to boost Bremen's economy and thus create employment, it is vital to help companies, especially SMEs to become more competitive. ICT investment is one solution but obstacles to investing in IT and eBusiness remain high. Therefore, Bremen decided to help companies to implement innovative IT solutions in an intelligent and sustainable way. SMEs are supported through consultations with "e.biz consultants" and by information events. Moreover, the project supports a successful market launch of Bremen ICT products.

The "Mittelstandsoffensive" proceeds as follows: SMEs that plan to improve business by means of implementing new ICT products, processes or systems but which do not have ICT internal expertise can seek support from the project team. The project team provides the SME with a list of 3 names from the "e.biz pool" of around 30 consultants from which the SME can choose the most appropriate consultant.

The "e.biz" consultant supports the SME by intensively analysing company processes and eventually giving advice on how to improve these processes with ICT applications. Advice ranges from very a basic level (e.g. connectivity) to more complex issues (e.g. e-security and IPR or other legal issues) or more specialised areas (e.g. mobile applications for the logistics sector). The e.biz consultation usually takes two full days and is free of charge for the company. The consultation is bound to be neutral in terms of products/suppliers, and the advice of the consultant is not obligatory for the consulted SME.

Within the first 3 years of the project 266 e.biz consultations were carried out. After each consultation around 40% of the SMEs were interviewed to check the quality and appropriateness of the intervention. Most were very positive and the few weaknesses identified were taken up with the individual consultant. More than 90% of the consulted SMEs decided to follow the consultant's advice. Following an e.biz consultation the consulted SMEs invested, an average of 24,500 € in new IT. The consultants were paid by the project partners, but all investment income from SMEs went to companies on the supply side. Neither partners received any income from the project.



By supporting the SMEs with qualified consultation and reducing their reluctance to invest, the "Mittelstandsoffensive" helps Bremen's SMEs make sustainable investments. Moreover, the total investments of 6.5 m € by the consulted companies in IT products has a very good leveraging effect on Bremen's regional economy. With this total investment an estimated number of 160 places of work were created or saved in 2004 to 2006.

Another important element of the "Mittelstandsoffensive" is that it supports applications developed in Bremen (especially those within the regional development programme "Bremen in t.i.m.e.") by introducing them to the market. The e.biz-consultants are made familiar with these new products and they can - if applicable - advise the consulted SME to use this product. This means that the project not only helped raise awareness and meet demand-side needs, but it also helped generate revenues for the Bremen region.

In addition more than 50 information events and workshops were organised to inform potential users and developers on IT solutions, trends and legal aspects. The event focus is always the benefit that can be derived from the use of IT and not the technology itself.

In conclusion, the "Mittelstandsoffensive" is an integrated and transferable concept that unites the support for regional companies from the developer and from the user group.

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Delivering Radical Regional Innovation across Scotland 2004-2006 Scottish Innovative Actions Programme

Ken Gordon
Programme Manager, Strathclyde European Partnership Ltd.

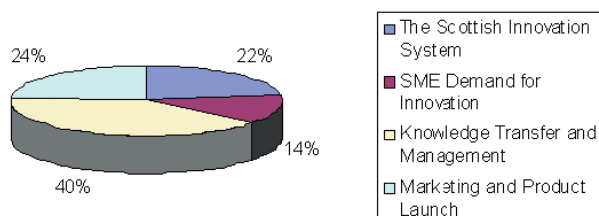
The Scottish Innovative Actions Programme started in 2004 and will end early in 2007. It is the first European Funds Programme to operate across the whole of Scotland and is driven by a partnership of the main economic development organisations and key private sector representatives. This ensures that it can support cutting-edge pilot projects that can not be supported under the other European programmes, has maximum impact across public policy, innovation support and is a driver for innovation in SMEs across Scotland.

A total of £4 million was invested in the Programme. 50% of this investment was provided by the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the remainder by Programme partners.

The Programme has funded 20 exciting and significant pilot projects, all now completed. Each project tested new ideas and methods concentrated on four key Action Lines.

- The Scottish innovation system – projects which explored new systems based approaches towards innovation in Scotland.
- SME demand for innovation – projects which examined business attitudes to innovation and piloted new methods to stimulate demand within SMEs.
- Knowledge transfer and management – projects that introduced new methods to help Scottish SMEs access knowledge and learning and to manage and exploit knowledge within their business.
- Marketing and product launch – projects which tested new mechanisms to support Scottish SMEs to create new markets and turn innovation into value.

**Scottish Innovative Actions
Projects Supported by Action Line**



First we need a map...

Scottish Executive-led projects received ERDF awards totalling £69,600 to map the entire Scottish Innovation system, identify the key actors, their roles in the system and the level of interactions and to examine best practice across

Europe. The projects are already influencing strategic forward thinking on innovation policy.

Distance is no problem...

Motivating and supporting SMEs to innovate is a major challenge. Highlands and Islands Enterprise was awarded £315,000 ERDF and has been working with MediaLab to pilot a new model for supporting SMEs and micro-businesses in remote areas. Funding support for a further five years invested in a new facility in the Highlands called Distance Lab (<http://www.distancelab.org/>) will fund research on how digital media and ICT can help manage the impact that distance has on individuals, communities and businesses in the north of Scotland and other areas.

Hold onto your assets...

Over two-thirds of Scottish companies are unaware of the potential importance of Intellectual Assets (IA) to their business. The Intellectual Assets Centre Ltd has developed tools to enable SMEs to take full commercial advantage of their in-house knowledge base and other IA. The tools are available on-line (<http://www.ia-centre.org.uk/>) and have created a great deal of interest both inside and outside Scotland. ERDF support of £203,852 enabled the Centre to develop and test the tools that now provide new services to business.

Play the game to learn...

Raising awareness and competence of Scottish SMEs in marketing is the focus of 4 linked pilot projects on marketing innovation. Scottish Enterprise received an award of £65,000 ERDF and has developed a project that uses a game to raise awareness of the importance of marketing to SMEs (<http://www.thebusiness-game.com>).

Next steps...

Scottish Innovative Actions has been the start of a new innovation focus for Scotland and the lessons learned from the pilot projects are being used to permanently change the innovation support environment in Scotland.

The recently published "Innovative Strategies and Actions" report published by DG-Regio highlights the partnership created as one of the key features in programme. The partnership encompasses all the key agencies in the innovation support system. This has ensured that pilot project outcomes, learning and good practice can be embedded in the policies of the major economic development agencies and policy making bodies at all strategic levels.

The legacy...

The policy and research pilot projects have revealed new

information on environmental factors that affect business growth, new methods of securing capital against intangible assets and new methods of capturing, comparing and modifying business models. The lessons from these projects is being used to direct future thinking on innovation.

Projects examining unique problems that family owned businesses encounter and that introduce the concepts of channel and product marketing have led to the creation of self sustaining networks and have incorporated new techniques in SMEs.

A further six projects will continue beyond the ERDF funding period:

- Internet tools to capture and assess intangible assets.
- A tested method that helps companies create innovative products and process.
- A university based portal where you can find IP, a contract and make a deal with a click of the mouse.
- A single portal enabling SMEs to contact experts in all Scottish Universities.
- Distance Lab, now funded for five years that incorporates the best parts of the Medialab pilot project.
- A marketing community website where businesses and professionals can meet to help each other and learn about marketing.

It is not finished yet!

In 2007 there is a programme of dissemination and networking activities that are focussed on giving pilot project outcomes the best possible chance of being embedded in policy and sharing them in Europe.

To find out more about events planned for 2007 visit our web site at
www.scottishinnovativeactions.co.uk
or contact: Ken.Gordon@wsep.co.uk
Tel. 0044 (0) 141 572 4422





Clusters and Networks Thematic Working Group Update

Clive Winters, TWG Co-ordinator

Clusters Study Visit

The Clusters and Network TWG Study Visit was organised in the region of Vento (Italy) on the 16 - 17 January 2007. This location was decided on the basis of good practices inserted into the ERIK database showing interesting regional cluster initiatives.

Study Visit participants enjoyed presentations on the Vega Science Park, the role and activities of Veneto Innovazione and on regional cluster initiatives. A detailed presentation was also given on a second European good practice from the ERIK database: Knowledge Alliance - South Holland Knowledge to the Market.

Full descriptions of the good practices can be found at:
<http://www.eriknetwork.net/frontend/search.php>

The second day saw a presentation and company visit from Uniflair, Padova on their Air Conditioning and Industrial Refrigeration Cluster. This was followed by an afternoon in Cisas (Centro Interdipartimentale Studi ed Attività Spaziali) and presentations on technology transfer from aerospace to traditional sectors, footwear cluster and training centre initiatives and the regional biotech initiative.

Presentations and links are available at:
<http://www.eriknetwork.net/studyvisit.html>

The visit was held in conjunction with the "Patterns of Evolution" Conference (<http://www.ecluster.it/conference/>) organised by Veneto Innovazione and bringing together policy makers, EU experts, academics, district managers and practitioners from European regions. Based on the e-Cluster project co-financed by the RPIA, the conference focussed on the future of clusters: creating organisational models, fostering networking and transnational cooperation and promoting technologies and policies for cluster development.

Policy Recommendations

Innovation, imitation, and entrepreneurship are what propel virtually all competitive clusters. Throughout Europe regional

clusters have become an important policy element for growth and employment. Some Spanish regions, Catalonia and the Basque country in particular, have long since used cluster methods, as have Denmark and the Netherlands. Sweden, the UK, German and Italian regions, and Finland are examples of more recent adopters and many countries outside Europe also apply similar ideas.

Evaluation is becoming increasingly important in these initiatives. Data is needed for more systematic selection of appropriate clusters and to define their action agendas. It is also needed to evaluate impact, not least to provide politicians with supporting evidence to show voters and tax payers. Information on performance outcomes alone is not enough to evaluate the potential for cluster growth and to inform policy. It is critical to understand business environment conditions at a specific location which allow companies in the cluster to reach high levels of productivity and innovation. Such data across different dimensions is, however, hard to access, especially when looking for comparisons.

To fully evaluate cluster policies, an array of indicators must be used. Economic goals, such as employment and wage growth, are important but, being influenced by other factors, are a problematic short-term indicators. Changes in business environment quality, especially in areas targeted by cluster initiatives, are another candidate for evaluation and are more directly related to policy. Repeated surveys can deliver such data. Finally, operational performance is a direct reflection of cluster policy quality although it is not a policy goal in itself. Through international surveys of clusters data becomes available for benchmarking initiatives against operational best practices in the field.

Ultimately, the key to the work undertaken within this TWG has been the ability to understand and develop the key elements for cluster development and sustainability and to identify how best these might be transferred to other regions.





Innovation Finance Thematic Working Group Update

Småland med öarna, TWG coordinator

Innovation Finance Study Visit

The Regional Technological Centre (LTC) and the Regional Council in Jönköping, members of the TWG Innovation Finance, organised a study visit dedicated to "Financing Innovation in European Regions" in November 2006. Discussions dealt with systems for financing innovative ideas and highlighted private, public and joint initiatives.

It was stated in the opening of the study visit that regional development is dependent on infrastructure and communication structures. Further development demands improved public transport, expansion of the production system, incentives for companies to start and to stay and a county-level higher education system with national support. The companies visited show that regional growth in Småland and islands is largely due to current industrial expansion. In fact, RPIA ISMIS (Innovative Småland and islands), presented on this occasion, was the start of a regional cooperation journey between counties and enterprises.

In addition to the fruitful discussion, participants also visited Jönköping Science Park and Huskvarna Prototyp AB. The Science Park, owned jointly by the university, private and public entities, dedicates time and resources to starting, developing and initiating growth of business and companies. 'Huskvarna prototyper AB' is a High tech state of the art company with focus on forming prototypes for the Swedish market.

During the visit to the science park a number of good practices in the area of innovation finance were presented:

- Tekniklots: a regional agent for Nutek whose main task is to support small companies and provide professional assistance for development;
- Innovation Finance Network Portal Jönköping: a web-based tool which presents a view of public financing possibilities for SMEs in the region of Jönköping;
- SafeTool: delivers products and information systems for the construction industry;

- Combi Team: work as a close partner with the Science Park and help SMEs to analyse potential funding and development prospects.

Looking forward

The innovation finance policy recommendations

Funding for SMEs remains a vital issue and one which has not yet been adequately addressed. SMEs continue to feel that the flow of money from the Commission is not sufficiently directed towards them. Furthermore, they are often put off by the amount of bureaucracy that is necessary to apply for European funding, a fact highlighted also during participation in the RPIA. One way to address such issues would be to ensure that entrepreneurs are involved from the start of project or programme development in order to point out effective gaps and needs. This point is highlighted by a number of good practices analysed within ERIK.

Furthermore, success is often achieved when different instruments target actors on local and regional level. The establishment of the Mutual Guarantee Societies (KGF) is an example of how private and ERDF resources can be used to form a sustainable fund for continuous work. It has also served to prepare applications for authorisation from the Swedish Financial Supervision Authority. SCF is a newly introduced model for co-investing financing between public actors and the private equity sector in Sweden and other Union Member States.

A recommended focus for the next structural funds period is that of European initiatives for pre-seed and seed funding for SME's. The JEREMIE initiative could perhaps enable the new ERDF Operational Programmes to establish such funds and instruments in the ERDF for seed and growth finance would also help to promote such opportunities.

The full ERIK Innovation Finance policy recommendations will be presented at the ERIK conference.





Start-Ups and Spin-Offs Thematic Working Group Update

Amt der Niederösterreichischen Landesregierung
WST3 (Department for Economy, Tourism and Technology of the Federal Government of Lower Austria) with IDEUM

Performed activities

Since the last ERIK+ newsletter the TWG "Services and Support to Start-ups and Spin-offs" has focussed on the deduction of success factors in start-up / spin-off support and on the finalisation of the two case studies from Hamburg (Ideen- / GründerFONDS - Idea and Seed Fund) and Lower Austria (Pre-seed Fund - Acceleration of technology-based firms).

Representatives of these two regional governments held a bilateral workshop in mid November 2006. Based of the ERIK model for start-up support (see: www-eriknetwork.net for further details) both regions completed a self assessment on 40 indicators as preparation of the workshop. Within the workshop the scores for each indicator were compared step by step and underlying reasons for the scoring were identified. The workshop produced a list of success factors and critical issues in the field of start-up/spin-off support, as well as a better insight of both regional governments concerning their position on start-up support.

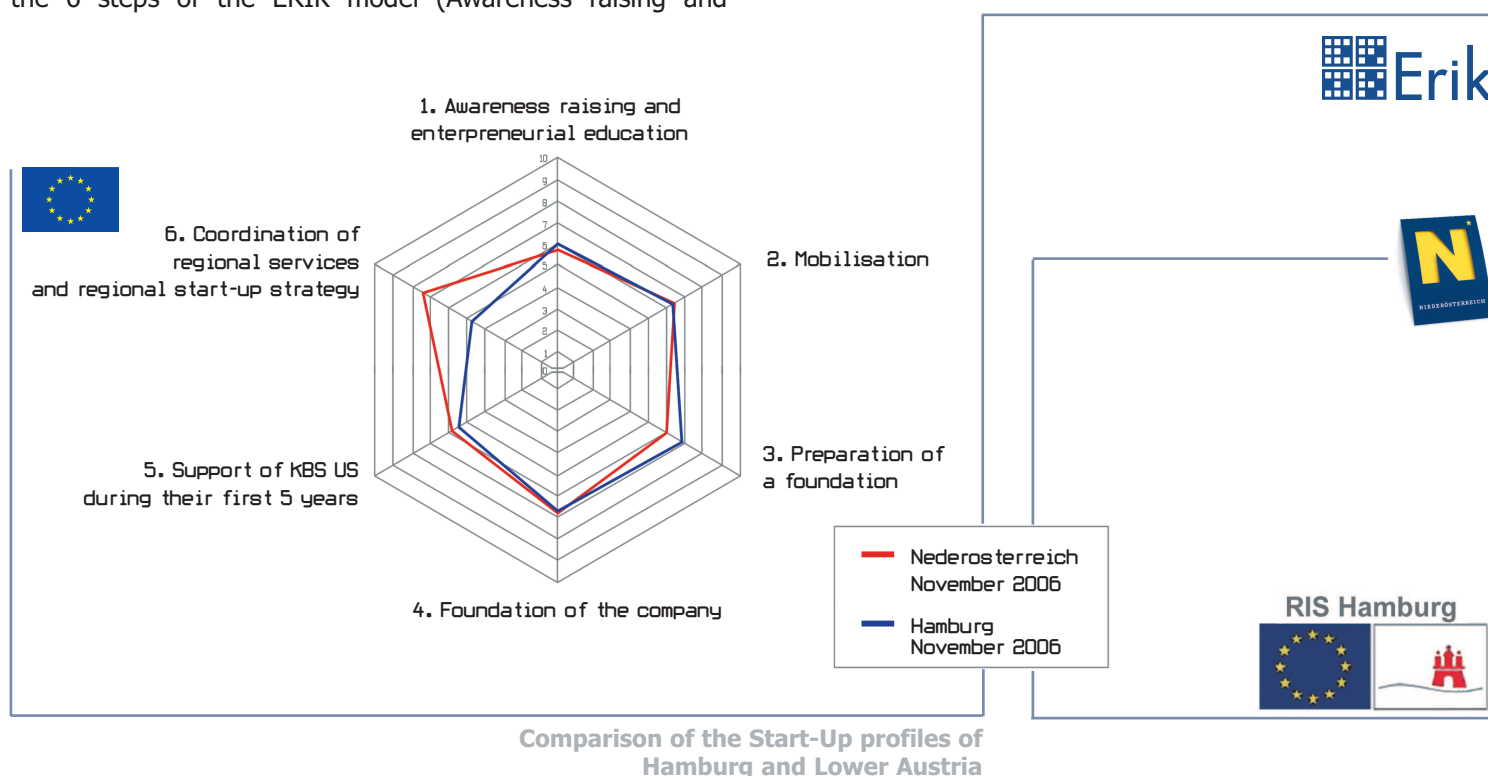
The TWG has outlined a number of "lessons learnt for start-up/spin-off support" based on activities carried out within the ERIK Network: the results of the study visit in Alentejo (July 2006), ERIK database Good Practices and the two in-depth case studies. The "lessons learnt" are structured according the 6 steps of the ERIK model (Awareness raising and

entrepreneurial education - feasibility of start-up - preparation of foundation - foundation of the company - support of start-ups and the accompanying activity coordination and monitoring of services). These lessons also reflect the broad range of potential innovative actions in the field of start-up/spin-off support. Research based/new technology based firms as target group are considered, as well as broader innovative support activities for innovation oriented start-ups/spin-offs. These lessons will become the core of the policy recommendations in the field of start-up / spin-off support.

What next?

The coordinator is working on the final TWG report which will present the two case studies of Hamburg and Lower Austria and the above-mentioned policy recommendations. These elements and other good practices will be discussed at the open TWG workshop and presented at final ERIK+ conference in Brussels on 10/11 May 2007.

For further information: Irma Priedl, irma.priedl@noel.gv.at, or Martina Ebner, Martina.Ebner@noel.gv.at, Department for Economy, Tourism and Technology, Federal Government of Lower Austria.





Industry Science Relations Thematic Working Group Update

Giorgia Valli, TWG Coordinator

Over the last few months ISR activities, coordinated by Emilia-Romagna, have focussed on the revision and upgrade of the 18 ISR good practices (GPs) collected from all over Europe, in view of publishing them in the project publication and promoting them at the ERIK Conference (Brussels, 10th/11th May 2007).

| Austria | |
|---|-------------------|
| Innovation Assistant | Nieder Österreich |
| Experts dialogue (Fachdialog) | Nieder Österreich |
| Belgium | |
| Postdoctoral Fellowships | Flanders |
| Technological services projects | Flanders |
| SBO- Strategic Basic Research programme | Flanders |
| TETRA- and HOBUE-Fund | Flanders |
| Interface services | Flanders |
| Italy | |
| Virtual technological park on genetics and biotechnologies for health | Emilia-Romagna |
| Support to the Development of Applied Research and Technology Transfer in the Health Sector | Emilia-Romagna |
| 3T (Tuscan Textile Technology) - NET | Toscana |
| OPTOMED | Toscana |
| OTTAGONO | Sicilia |
| OLIOTEC | Sicilia |
| Portugal | |
| SIMAA-Environmental and Agricultural Management System | Alentejo |
| INNOVATION SPACE - Unite innovation and rural world sustainability | Alentejo |
| Regional Innovation Centre of the Algarve | Algarve |
| Spain | |
| Research and Technological Development | Valencia |
| Sweden | |
| Sideum | Småland med öarna |

Following the "Call for Good Practices" (April 2006) and the collection of successful regional level initiatives, effort has been made to improve the GPs through requests for additional and clearer information, both general and specific to key aspects, such as transferability, innovative features and obstacles faced. These revisions are important for other

regions interested in really learning from these experiences.

The collection of GPs did not finish with the closure of the above-mentioned call. The newest GP (from Algarve region) was inserted into the ERIK database at the beginning of 2007, showing that this is a sustainable tool meant to be continuously updated and integrated.

The collected ISR Good Practices are accessible on line at the address <http://www.eriknetwork.net/frontend/search.php> and can be searched by region or by topic.

What next?

The ERIK Final Publication will include a chapter on Industry Science Relations, currently under preparation. This document, which will be available at the end of April 2007, will provide a description of the Good Practices collected and a set of policy recommendations based on these regional experiences.

Moreover, during the project conference in May 2007, a specific workshop on ISR will see international key note speakers presenting and discussing the importance of ISR for the development of the regional economy. Some of the most interesting Good Practices collected and analysed within ERIK will be presented, along with lessons learnt and the TWG policy recommendations emerging from the examples investigated.

During the 2 day conference a good practice Exhibition will give participants the opportunity to meet the representative of the good practices and to learn more about the ISR regional initiatives presented.

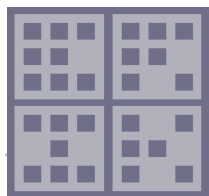
Further information on ISR TWG is available from:

Giorgia Valli (erik@aster.it)

ASTER – Science Technology Business

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Emilia-Romagna Region, Italy



Networks in the New Programming Period Learning from Experience

ERIK+ Operative Unit and IANIS+ Secretariat

The two sister networks ERIK and IANIS have enjoyed a four year period of financing thanks to co-funding from the DG REGIO Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions (RPIA). The RPIAs have offered regions a chance to test innovative projects, and the thematic networks have helped to disseminate projects and promote exchange and cooperation among members.

As we move into the new programming period 2007-2013 these specific programmes will no longer exist. Therefore, ERIK and IANIS will also have to adapt to changing circumstances and to corresponding changes in the needs, interests and concerns of their members. However, the European institutions continue to highlight the important role that regions play in the overall European game, the importance of networks and the vital nature of the themes on which the work of ERIK and IANIS is based. All these features will now find their expression in the European Commission initiative "Regions for Economic Change".

For 2007-2013, this new initiative, with a total budget of around €375 million euro, will see the creation of joint volunteer networks of Member States, regions and cities co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) pursuing selected development themes. Through "Regions for Economic Change", the Commission hopes to test and rapidly disseminate economic modernisation ideas within these themes.

The networks will be established by the Commission, but network members will have the responsibility for their animation and running. This initiative serves to highlight the points made above about the continued importance of the regional, and indeed local, dimensions.

The focus of both ERIK and IANIS would rest on the networks concerning the theme of "Improving knowledge and innovation for growth" and within this overall theme the ERIK regions would find particular interest in "Improving the capacity of regions for research and innovation" while IANIS regions would find themselves best represented in "Better ICT connections between regions" or "Bringing e-government to regions and businesses".

While the overall themes and structures are clear, exact network activities are still in the process of being defined. ERIK and IANIS take this opportunity to use their experience of networks to highlight some ways in which the new networks can bring about real benefits.

Experience exchange on specific themes

ERIK and IANIS have helped to provide an insight and overview into Regional Programmes of Innovative Actions. Further, they have created platforms to facilitate information exchange for their respective themes. This is a vital feature of networking and something that should be continued in a structured manner within the new networks.

It is important to stress that regions can benefit from learning about positive examples of regional policy but also from those less successful actions. Helping regions to critically analyse their own activities and to learn from mistakes is one area where networks have real added value. This becomes more important as the European Union continues to grow. Regions with a long history of developing, deploying and evolving innovation and ICT strategies can help less experienced regions to gain the positive elements from their experiences, while simultaneously avoiding the negative aspects.

The new networks will take into consideration overall regional policy for innovation and ICT rather than being linked to an individual programme. As member regions widen their interest and focus to other programmes, it is important that networks help them to do this. However, the actions should be concrete with specific aims and objectives leading to specific targeted results.

The focus has moved from knowledge and experience exchange in itself, towards exchange for precise, well-defined purposes. In this way, the exchange of experience can be transformed into sharing objectives. Regions with similar objectives in their regional policies can, through the network, create targeted subgroups to, for example, organise common calls and funding to promote regional economic development.



Updated information on European Union policy and initiatives

A network has a responsibility to keep members updated on initiatives and policy at European level. Indeed, members should benefit from privileged information about policy priorities at EU level, upcoming funding opportunities and even the opportunity to influence policy and programme development. This can be achieved, for example, through the network web sites, through direct contact with members or through information seminars. Both ERIK and IANIS have benefited in these terms from an established presence in Brussels. Being close to the European institutions and surrounded by information sources allows networks to keep their fingers on the pulse of current affairs.

Thus, new networks should concentrate their time and energy on monitoring developments in their relative fields and making sure that, through ad-hoc offices or regional representations, they always know what is going on and when. New networks will benefit in this sense from the integral role of the Commission in network formation and direction.

Building future collaboration

IANIS and ERIK have been projects in themselves and are therefore not responsible for developing further projects and pilot actions. However, they form a basis for further collaboration. They can build on relationships and contacts formed in order to develop concrete pilot actions and strategies. These may take the form of other projects with European funding, or indeed of individual cooperation initiatives among regions. This kind of long term cooperation and concrete initiatives should be encouraged and expanded. It is also vital to promote cooperation between different networks. Networks are divided into themes but their interests, topics and activities, and even their methodological approaches will inevitably overlap and interlink.

In order to avoid unnecessary duplication or competition, networks should be encouraged to communicate and to share common strategies, work plans and to organise common events. In this way, each network expands its reach and influence and therefore goes further to achieving the overall aim of improved regional development.



News

Knowledge for Regional Innovation: Towards "Regions for Economic Change"

Hotel Bristol Stephanie, 91-93 Avenue Louise
1050 Brussels

The ERIK (European Regions Knowledge Based Innovation) Network, co-financed by DG Regional Policy of the European Commission through its Regional Programme of Innovative Actions, has the pleasure of inviting you to its Final Conference.

The two day ERIK conference represents a space for actors from all over Europe and outside to debate the future role of regions in promoting economic growth through innovation, entrepreneurship and the growth of the knowledge economy, with particular relevance to the evolution of the European Commission initiative "Regions for Economic Change".

The conference offers:

- **4 Thematic Workshops**
Industry Science Relations, Support for Start-Ups and Spin-Offs, Clusters and Business Networks and Innovation Finance;
- **1 Plenary Session**
"Knowledge for Regional Innovation" - uniting the worlds of research, enterprise and public government;
- **1 Round Table**
ERIK Policy Recommendations and Regions of Economic Change;
- **1 Exhibition of Good Practices**
Over 30 successful experiences collected from around Europe;
- **ERIK prize**
For good practice and exhibition poster.

This event should not be missed by representatives from:

- National, regional and local administrations;
- Business organisations, banks and enterprises;
- Networks and associations;
- Universities, research and consultancy organisations;
- EU institutions.

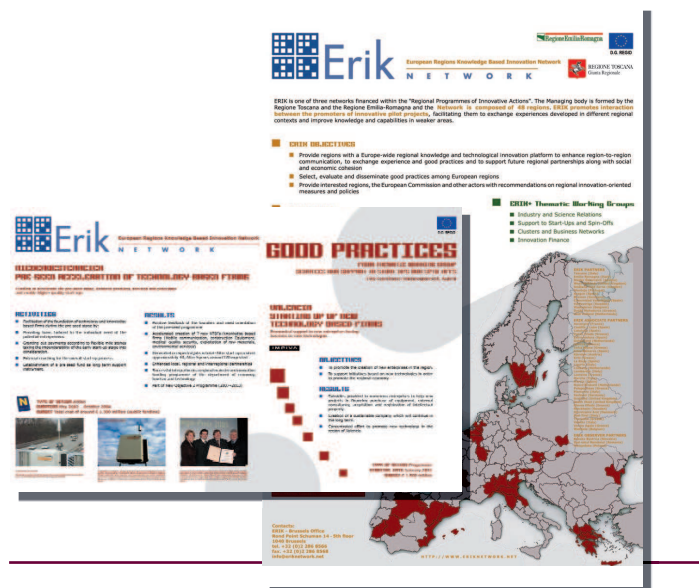
The conference working languages will be English, French and Italian.

For enquiries: conference@eriknetwork.net

For registration, the programme and information:
www.eriknetwork.net

10/11 May 2007

Erik Network Conference





Other News

Regions for Economic Change Fostering Competitiveness through Innovative Technologies, Products and Healthy Communities

Brussels 7 – 8 March

On 7 and 8 March 2007, the European Commission will hold the first annual conference of the 'Regions for economic change' initiative. The event is organised by the Commission's Regional Policy Directorate General and other Commission services together with the French region of Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur and in cooperation with the Committee of the Regions.

During the event, Commissioner Danuta Hübner will launch the "Regional Innovation Awards" seeking best European practice and innovation in regional policy. More than 500 participants from regions all over Europe are expected to discuss how European regional policy and its instruments contribute to competitive regions and cities through innovation and exchange of best practice. In nine workshops, the event will showcase strategies, experiences and projects intended to provide learning and networking opportunities for Structural Funds managing authorities. Registration is now open.

For more information see the DG REGIO Website:
http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/index_en.htm

ERRIN re-launched: a voice for regions

The European Regions Research & Innovation Network (ERRIN Asbl) has been re-launched as an autonomous Brussels based network designed to support regions participate fully and effectively in the European Research Area. By improving coordination and communication between Brussels based regional representations, ERRIN strengthens cooperation and synergies between regions across Europe.

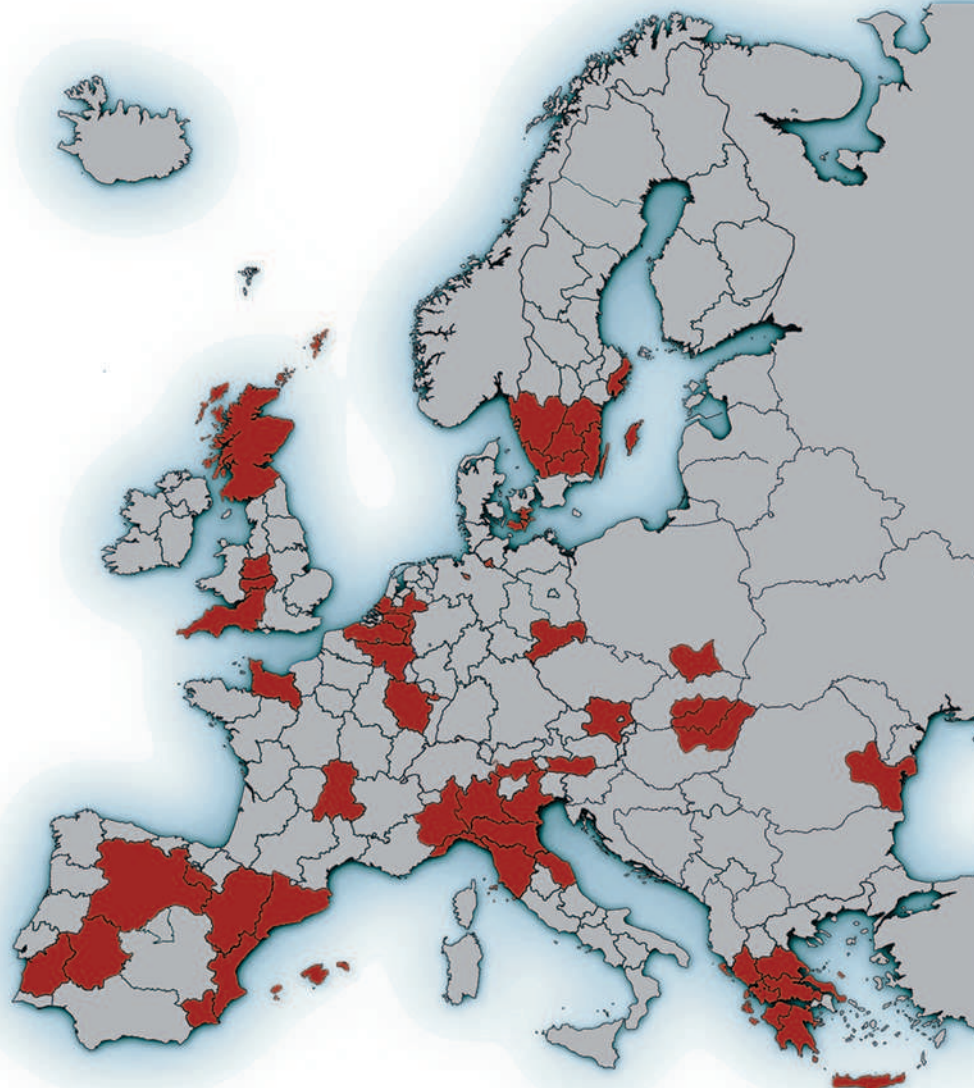
Building on the past success, ERRIN will further develop its activities to involve regional practitioners in European Research and Innovation. Examples of such activities include: briefing sessions on topics of high interest for our members, workshops to facilitate mutual learning and exchange of experiences, marketplaces for project and proposal development, continued dialogue with the European institutions and working groups on specific themes to facilitate the involvement of regional practitioners.

ERRIN members benefit from several advantages, such as attending events or specific Working Group of personal interest, easy access to information and activities coming from the European Institutions and others members, meeting people with similar interests and goals, exchanging experience and finding potential partners to be involved in European projects and to work on policy issues.

To learn more about ERRIN, membership fees and future activities, visit our web site at www.errin-brussels.org or send an email to: communication@errin-brussels.org



THE ERIK NETWORK



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