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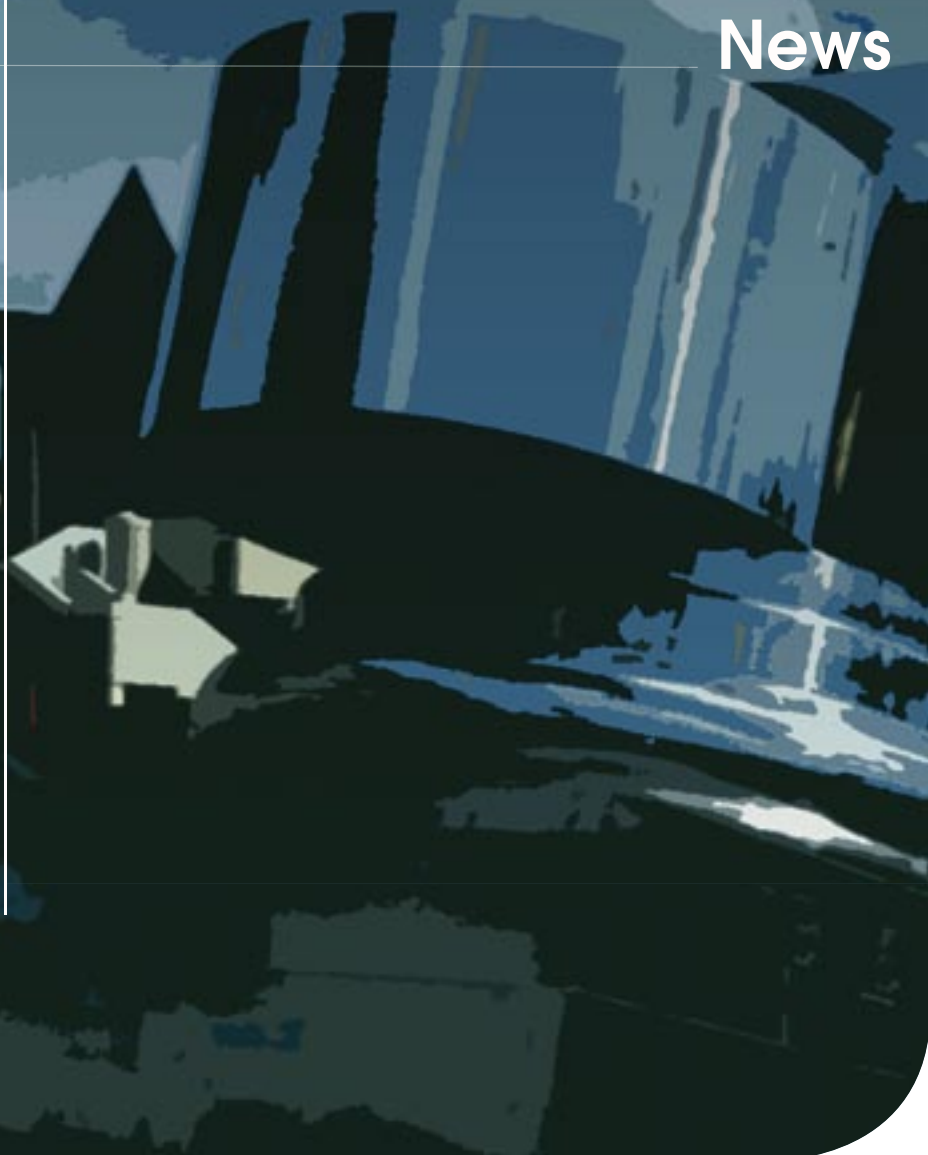
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DEVELOPING INDUSTRIAL STRATEGIES THROUGH
INNOVATIVE CLUSTERS AND TECHNOLOGIES

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DISTRICT: Presentation of the RFO

DISTRICT is an INTERREG IIC Regional Framework Operation (RFO) focused on Knowledge Economy and Technological Innovation.

The project meets a need for improved innovation strategies and policies and its general aim is to improve the regional development and the cohesion policies, especially those aiming at the increase of RTDI activities by industrial SMEs, through a close cooperation, in order to make the transition of the project partners' economies towards a development model based on knowledge easier.

Four European Regions - Tuscany, West Midlands, Sachsen, Västra Götaland - will carry out the activities of the DISTRICT project. Each Region - active members of ERIK (European Regions Knowledge based Innovation Network), a specific network within the Regional Program of Innovative Actions (RPIA) by ERDF - will lead a single component of the project while Tuscany Region - Lead Partner of the DISTRICT project - is responsible for the management of the operation and for the dissemination activities related to the project.

DISTRICT has been designed considering that regional economies of the partners have been, and still are, strongly dependant on industry; in these last years the challenge of globalisation is particularly relevant for industrial areas as it often brings risk of marginalisation of entire regions or clusters. For these reasons the partners share the concern for the decline of competitiveness of their industrial structure due to

(a) a limited capability of the SMEs to have access to knowledge and technological innovation;

(b) the attitude of medium and large industries to relocate to countries with lower labour costs;

(c) underperformance of regional institutions supporting innovation.

A major challenge in this respect is to better exploit and enhance the tacit knowledge generated in the regions during the expansion of industrial economies in order to improve the capacities of clusters and SMEs and enable them to connect to new market niches and gain high levels of qualified employment. In this context, DISTRICT will focus on cooperation in three policy areas:

(i) Clusters and business networks;

(ii) SMEs innovation projects with Universities and Technology Centres;

(iii) Innovation financial engineering, seed, venture capital, start-up and spin-off.

The idea is to provide regions with concrete operative cases and tools that are tailored to their contexts and better equipped for the next EU Cohesion Policy programming period. **DISTRICT will provide partner regions with the opportunity to establish a continuous cooperation framework to exchange information and best practices as well as jointly develop improved methodologies and**

tools for devising regional strategies, strategic planning and pilot actions. In order to offer a wider perspective of cases the partnership has been thought as representing the most relevant contexts and stages in which the problem has disclosed its features. In particular the three specific objectives of the operation are:

- developing regional capabilities through application of innovation, knowledge management and economic and technological intelligence techniques that will allow for development, testing and delivery of ground breaking approaches and new services for companies involved in local clusters and business networks.

- increasing the embeddedness of the academic and research institutions in the regional economic system.

- fostering the creation of technology based firms through stimulation of business ideas and supporting spinouts from Universities, Research Centres and existing SMEs.

Activities in the partners regions

During the first semester of the project all the partners have tried to involve their regional partnership in an activity of raising awareness on the objectives and on the purposes of DISTRICt at local level. To do so each DISTRICt regional Unit has organised a press conference and a launch seminar to present the programme, intended for the main institutional social and economic actors present at regional level.

Many participants, interested in the development of DISTRICt subprojects, have attended the meetings, along with many other politic and economic actors which have actively participated at the events.

Tuscany

On the 20th and 21st of December 2005 Tuscany started the series of meetings relating to the project at regional level with the seminar "Cities in transition and Strategic Planning - The Innovation pathway and Knowledge Economy". The event, organised in the municipality hall of Prato, has seen the intervention of many local actors, more than 50, which have actively participated at the event.

The Prato seminar's aims were to present the DISTRICt project to the general public and to develop some main issues related to the project.

During the first day a general presentation of the Regional Framework Operation of Mr Massimo Bressan - DISTRICt Project Manager - has been followed by a particular focus on the thematic components of the project, presented by Ms Cornelia Kanna from Sachsen Region and by Mr Christer Enrskog from Vastra Gotaland Region which have also explained the contribution expected from the Tuscan local partnership in the implementation of DISTRICt sub-project related to their

component's activities.

The working session has seen the intervention of the Italian Minister of Industry and Transport - responsible for the Italian partners in the Interreg Operations - and of Professor Marco Bellandi from the University of Florence which has presented the Tuscan Regional Space of Innovation and Research.

On the second part of the day a thematic session focused on

the urban transformation of the industrial areas in Europe has seen the interventions of Professor Marco Cremaschi from the University of Rome and of Professor Raffaele Brancati from the MET Institute of Rome.

The second day of the seminar was focused on the strategic planning techniques related to the industrial areas; the working session was chaired by Mr Mario Pezzini of OECD and saw the participation of Mr Massimo Cella from the



The seat of the DISTRICt Secretariat in Prato (Pecci Museum of Contemporary Art Premises)

Toscana (Italy)

Tuscany is 22,992 squared km wide. It has 3,566,081 inhabitants (2004, source ISTAT), about 6.2% of Italian population. The Tuscan GDP in 2003 amounts to about 6.8% of the national one. The per capita GDP is 9% above the national average and equal to the current EU per capita GDP.

West Midlands (United Kingdom)

The West Midlands has a population of over 5.2 million people, making it the fifth largest region in England. The Region is comprised of the countries of Herefordshire, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire and the Metropolitan county of the West Midlands. Output in the West Midlands amounted to over £77 billion in 2003, up by 5.6% on 2002 and constituting 8% of total UK output.

Sachsen (Germany)

The Free State of Saxony borders on the Czech Republic in the south and Poland in the East, and on federal states of Brandenburg, Saxony-Anhalt, Thuringia and Bavaria. Saxony's GDP increased by 2.3% at constant prices from 2003 to 2004. The Saxon economy therefore experienced considerably more vigorous growth than the federal average of 1.7%.

Vastra Gotaland (Sweden)

The region has 49 municipalities and a population of nearly 1.5 million. It is almost 300 km across in all directions. 50% of Sweden's exports go through the region and the automotive industry, represented by Volvo and Saab, is its most important industrial activity.

West Midlands

Municipality of Milan and of Mr Carlo Ricci from the FORMEZ Institute of Rome.

Those interested in the original presentations are invited to visit the DISTRICt web-site www.district-rfo-org.

The seminar was intended to raise the awareness of the local actors on the objectives of the project and to give it more visibility, to this purpose a press conference patronised by the Regional Government Presidency was organised during the 19th of December.

Mr Ambrogio Brenna, Regional Councillor of Industry and Productive Activities, and Mr Riccardo Conti, Regional Councillor of Infrastructure and Transports, on that occasion have presented the DISTRICt project to a wide range of regional newspapers and television.

The launch of the DISTRICt project in the West Midlands took place the 1st December 2005 with an half day event.

A broad range of public sector organisations attended the regional launch of the project, with more than 60 participants coming from universities, business support organisations, innovation task groups and chambers of commerce.

After a general presentation of the Regional Framework Operation and an introduction on the thematic component focus and tasks, the agenda of the meeting brought the attention on the detailed presentation of the thematic areas of the project and on the innovative character of the project. A broad range of experts from the institutional sectors as well as from the innovation centres of West Midlands, explained to the audience the implementation possibilities represented by the DISTRICt project for the UK local partnership. The conclusion of Mr John Cornbill were devoted to the presentation of the DISTRICt call for proposals for sub-project foreseen by the end of February.

During the meeting various material related to the project were distributed along with a template for sub-project ideas prepared by the local DISTRICt Unit; 12 'Expressions of Interest' totally arrived to the DISTRICt officers in the UK as a result of the launch event. Feedback has been provided to organisations submitting EOI's and further assistance shall be provided by assisting organisations identifying potential partners in proposed projects through our interregional partnership.

Västra Götaland

The kick-off took place on November 9th 2005 at a two days conference in Hindås organized by Innovation Bridge West in Göteborg. The conference was an excellent opportunity to present an overview of the DISTRICT programme and a more in-depth information concerning themes for the planned sub-projects. Most of the relevant regional and sub-regional organisations in Western Sweden dealing with entrepreneurship, academic innovation, start-ups, business support and public financing were present at this conference. The 49 participants represented universities, university colleges, incubators, science parks, Connect West, holding companies at universities, business development organisations, Innovation Bridge West and

Region Västra Götaland. The main event at this conference was the workshop: VISION 2010 "How can the innovation system in West Sweden become one of the most successful in the European Union". The discussion was very lively. Many suggestions from the seven working groups will be taken into consideration to improve the Regional Innovation System for NTBFs to top European level. This conference was also an good opportunity to have more informal discussions with persons and organisation interested to participate in sub-projects.

Special information concerning DISTRICT has also been given to Industrial Research Institutes at a meeting on November 15th. Representatives from the Regions and from federation of

municipalities was also given through a brief presentation on November 18th.

Concerning more general publicity there has been an article in the supplement "Industry & Research" in Sweden largest daily business newspaper (The Daily Industry). The headline was World class Innovation System and the core message was that industrial SMEs must make more use of external specialists and the Regions effort to create and implement a world class innovation service for the industrial sector. There is also a need to develop and test new methods and operational procedures to further develop the Regional Innovation Systems. DISTRICT and its partners regions will play an important role in this process.

Sachsen

The Kick-Off DISTRICT in Saxony was announced within the context of the 5th Interregional Conference of the Interreg III C project REVITAE, where the Saxony Economic Development Corporation (SEDC) holds the Lead-Partnership. It took place the 24th November 2005 at the "Kulturpalast" of Dresden City with over 85 participants; among them representatives of REVITAE partner regions in Austria, Slovenia and Hungary, representatives of saxon regional and local authorities, research institutes, associations and notably the DISTRICT delegation from the partner regions of West-Midlands/ UK and Västra Götaland/Sweden. The official inauguration of the conference was opened by the Managing Director of the SEDC, Mr. Markus Löttsch, followed by a speech of Mrs. Anja Kostian, Saxon State Ministry for Economic Affairs and Employment, about Saxony's economic policy in reference to governmental support and encouragement of implementing EU projects. The meeting was an occasion to discuss some main issues related to the Interreg 3C project:

- Under the title: "Promoting and Assisting the Economy" best- practices results and experiences were pointed out, particularly different economic and organizational frame conditions of an east-zone Interreg III C - project .
- The DISTRICT delegation have taken an active part in workshop A: "Integrated Approach for Business Development" opened by presentations, e.g.: "Saxony as Business and Technology location" or "Evaluation of Network Strategy" by the Fraunhofer Institute of Systems and Innovation Research. Subsequently the presented topics were debated. (reports of the workshops, presentations under www.revitae.net)
- The Kick-Off presentation, held by Mrs. Kanna introduced DISTRICT to the public audience of the conference. Information about the projects objectives, partners, targets, frame conditions, budget, sub-project participation, potential sub-partners of different branches in Saxony as well as facts and figures of the socio-economic context of the 4 DISTRICT partner regions were given. During the 25th of November

a study tour was organized to visit Infineon Technologies Dresden. The 4th largest chip producer in the world ranking of the semiconductor industry operates its production in Germany in the northern area of Dresden. This industrial settlement of microelectronics is a best practice in Saxony. In co-operation AMD and Infineon have established the joined AMTC photomasc production. Research and development premisses are in the midst of the industrial park. Infineon employs over 5500 workers. The importance of the SME supplier network and technology transfer were explained to the DISTRICT/REVITAE delegation. The production process includes about 400 steps started from the wafer up to the final product: the chip. While the tour inside the company, the automation could be seen by visiting the assembly. To learn from that high innovative management, taken all dependancies and needs of coordination into consideration, the DISTRICT participants could gain certain ideas generating the components sub-project design.



The seat of the DISTRICT office in Göteborg



Leipzig New Exhibition and Convention Centre (Ph. Michael Lange)

Strategic thinking in INTERREG development: Spatial visions and scenarios

27- 28 February 2006 - Milan, IT

INTERACT Point Qualification and Transfer (QT), in cooperation with ESPON, is arranging a seminar on important tools for enhancing the strategic approach in the new generation of INTERREG programmes. The seminar will present and discuss the outcomes of a study to compare and analyse ongoing spatial vision and scenario activities across INTERREG III and ESPON programmes. The aims are to identify gaps, stimulate synergies and draw up proposals for future action and strategic programme and project development by providing a platform for exchanging experiences on spatial vision and scenario activities across INTERREG strands.

For more info <http://www.interact-eu.net>

Joint meeting of the IRE subgroup 'Regional clusters as innovation drivers' and the Industrial Regions group

9 - 10 March 2006 - East Lombardy, IT

The IRE Secretariat with the coordination of Mr Nils Gabriëlsson is organising a thematic event on Regional Clusters.

For more info n.gabriëlsson@innovating-regions.org

European research and innovation exhibition, France

8 to 11 June 2006 Paris, FR .

The European research and innovation exhibition has become a popular event for players in the world of research, innovation and the environment, both in France and abroad. Professionals, students, researchers and families are invited to meet with these specialists. The Scientific Committee is preparing a rich programme of conferences, roundtables, activities and debates to enlighten the public.

For further information, please visit: http://www.salon-de-la-recherche.com/index_en.php

The DISTRICT Regional Framework Operation will develop its activities basically through an implementation phase, realized by means of sub-projects, focused on the three cooperation areas developed by the project's thematic components:

- C1: Cluster and business networks;**
- C2: Innovation projects for SME, in collaboration with Universities and Technology Centres;**
- C3: Innovation financing, risk capital, start-up and spin off.**

A trans-national call for sub-projects will be launched in the first semester of 2006 by the DISTRICT partnership (see www.district-rfo.org for more info).

Eligible sub-projects will have to be trans-national, pursue endorsement of the project's thematic components and show effective impact on efficient use of resources and innovation. Subprojects should deliver operative tools, most suitable to the European context and the future Cohesion Policy of the EU.

Each sub-project - presented by actors from DISTRICT Regions - will consist in three phases:

- 1. foresight: development of a vision on the future scientific, technological, economical and social tendencies, shared among all the institutional, economic and social operators concerned at the local level;**
- 2. planning: elaboration or improvement of local plans and strategies;**
- 3. experimentation: implementation of pilot schemes in the project's thematic components, within the strategy and local action plan.**

The tutoring activity of the DISTRICT Partners to support the definition of subproject will give rise to two workshops in March and April 2006. Whereas the first event will focus on defining proposals, the second one will inaugurate a collective methodological pathway by a sort of Trans-regional Scientific Board dealing with the main themes of the DISTRICT project.