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districtDEVELOPING INDUSTRIAL STRATEGIES THROUGH
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editorial

2007-2013: what future for Regional Framework Operations?

Paolo Guarnieri

DISTRICT Secretariat - Tuscany Region

centers and universities, service centers, SMEs, etc.

By involving key actors in the local socio-economic systems, RFOs have proved to be very effective in contributing to the transformation of regions and cities. The side-by-side involvement of relevant stakeholders for a significant period of time, allowed real, concrete exchange of formal and informal knowledge from one system to the other, thereby accomplishing what is commonly called "partnership in action".

It is no surprise that the European Commission has rightly insisted that the former Interreg IIIC Programme should carry on in the new programming phase as the Interregional Cooperation Programme - the so called "Interreg IVC". The impact of such experiences should be increased in the new programming phase, former lessons and indications should be profited and deeper and more significant levels of cooperation should be developed.

The four innovations introduced by the RFEC initiative - the sharper focus on selected strategic themes, the fast-track option to test new policy ideas, the two way-bridge to rapidly transfer good practices to mainstream programmes, and the enhanced communication effort - all greatly contribute to the overall objective of modernization of the European economy together with increased social and territorial cohesion.

Regional Framework Operations give us confidence about the steps ahead. Such experiences as DISTRICT's do show that committedly working together is the way to maximize profiting from each other. Territories should be able to express their needs and shape their actions by reacting to each other. Enough attention, time and resources should be provided to such initiatives, so that the EU27 may become more innovative and integrated, providing most promising opportunities in the face of global challenges.

In its two years lifetime DISTRICT demonstrated the feasibility and meaningfulness for regions to cooperate. What initially was a group of formally committed actors, turned into a solid collaborative ensemble, collectively contributing to and profiting from the Operation innovative approaches.

The recent Regions for Economic Change Initiative by the Commission calls for stronger cooperation among regions and cities across Europe. More intense partnerships among regional and local actors are expected to play a key role in globally boosting innovation in the EU. Qualified partnerships of territorial actors are in the best position to locate and transfer successful experiences and good practices. How to accomplish this is still being debated.

In this context, the 2000-2006 Interreg III programme stands as a valuable storehouse of experiences from the former programming period. Strand C of the Interreg III programme in particular - acting as a sort of global policy lab - elicited a formidable participation on the side of the regions.

Almost 200 regions participated in the programme, virtually leaving no corner of the EU unaffected. With more than 2,5 thousands actors involved, partnerships focused on such strategic themes as local development, research and innovation, environmental protection and territorial regeneration: themes that are still present in the priority list of the RFEC initiative.

The bottom-up approach of the programme - together with its novel, "experimental" nature - allowed regions and local authorities to formulate and put to test new ways and tools to interact and work together. The quantity and quality of original approaches to cooperation constitute a precious storehouse of experiences for the new programming strategies.

Among the three kinds of initiatives (projects, networks and RFOs) Regional Framework Operations require the greatest degree of cooperation and commitment among actors. The high level of interest raised by this kind of operations - notwithstanding the initial delay, complexity and accompanying difficulties of implementation, testifies to the strategic importance of this kind of "operative" interaction among regional policy makers.

In a relatively short period of time Regional Framework Operations have been able to mobilize key intellectual and decisional stakeholders at the local level, bringing to the forefront edge of cooperation such strategic actors as regional and local authorities, research

Research, incubators and technological centres in a knowledge-intensive area: a study visit in Tuscany

On October 26th the DISTRICT Study Visit in Tuscany began with a half a day workshop on "Incubators, Technological Centres and Spin-offs in the Pisan area" at the Technological Pole (Polo Tecnologico) Navacchio.

The workshop's aim was to provide an overview of the regional economic system with a special focus on the Pisa Province - featuring an outstanding High Tech profile. Target institutes of the study visit were also introduced, including Incubators, Research Centres, Universities, etc., embodying most innovative experiences in the Region.

Businesses in the Technological Pole were visited. Hosting innovative enterprises is one aim of the Pole, which is meant to create a most favourable milieu for increased competitiveness of small to medium enterprises. Most advanced facilities are provided together with knowledge from technological research centres, thereby allowing companies to positively participate in national/international applied research networks. By bringing together several businesses from the advanced tertiary sector in one single location, top level know-how and services can be provided, e.g., support for start-ups and first two years for SMEs. Co-operation between enterprises, research centres and universities, transfer of technological innovation, birth and growth of newly formed companies and support to developing ones - all this is fostered - mostly in the ICT, microelectronics, biomedical, robotics, energy, environment and service sectors.

The Institute of Information Science and Technologies and the Institute of Clinical Physiology of the National Research Council (Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche - CNR) Area in Pisa came next in the visit programme.

A huge number of basic and applied research projects are

run by the CNR in Pisa. Massive technological transfer, certification activities, etc. are taking place, in close contact with scientific and academic institutions, local administration, and national and international scientific institutions.

The Institute of Information Science and Technologies (ISTI), active since 2000, is committed to producing scientific excellence and playing an active role in technology transfer. Information Science, related technologies and a wide range of applications are covered, with the aim of increasing knowledge, developing and testing new ideas and widening application areas.

Organization of the research work is aimed at stimulating flexibility and reactivity. Dynamic units, called Research Laboratories or Technology Centers, are the backbone of this system. Members of the research staff are normally involved in one or more of these units. Curiosity driven and independent research is also encouraged.

As regards Research Laboratories, this pursue a well-defined set of strongly related scientific objectives. Besides research, objectives may also cover technology development and training. Teams include permanent staff, visitors, post-doctoral fellows and doctoral students, with an average of 10 members per Lab. Research Laboratories are largely independent and results are subject to periodical evaluation. The current number of Research Laboratories is 14:

Creative Virtual Systems Lab (CVS)
Dependable Computing Lab (DC)
Domotics Laboratory (HA)
Formal Methods and Tools Lab (FMT)
"Human Interfaces in Information Systems" Laboratory (HIIS)
High Performance Computing Laboratory (HPC)
Knowledge Discovery and Delivery Laboratory (KDD)

Mechanics of Materials and Structures Laboratory (MMS)
Networked Multimedia Information Systems Laboratory (NMIS)
Signals & Images Laboratory (SI)
Software Engineering Lab (SE)
Space Flight Dynamics Lab (SFD)
Visual Computing Laboratory (VC)
Wireless Networks Laboratory (WN)

Technology Centers aim at enhancing and exploiting the competence of ISTI in specific areas. Typical activities include pre-competitive development, technology transfer and training. Technology Centers work in close collaboration with Research Laboratories, so as to foster the sharing of competence and the bi-directional flow of knowledge. As a general rule, staff of Technology Centers are also involved in one or more Research Laboratory. Technology Centers are largely independent and subject to periodical evaluation. The current number of Technology Centers is 3:

"Internet Services" Technology Center (RET)
"Information Systems" Technology Center (IS)
System and Software Evaluation Center (SSE)

Independent Research consists of free initiatives by individuals or small groups, aimed at widening and deepening their competence, at cultivating the spirit of diversity and at exploring interdisciplinary connections. The publication of innovative results and the open circulation of ideas within the scientific community are considered prime goals. The Institute recognizes the importance of independent research to drive the evolutionary process of the Laboratories and to help young researchers in developing scientific initiative and working autonomously. Independent research at ISTI is supported under a funding scheme that rewards scientific production and privileges young researchers.

Next to ISTE, the Institute of Clinical Physiology was visited. Since 1968 the Institute consolidated its role as a centre for basic, clinical, technological and epidemiological research. The multidisciplinary approach has been the key strategy driving years of collaborations on a flexible and problem-solving basis. The Institute houses a imaging department, basic science laboratories, bioengineering, computer science, biology, biochemistry, molecular medicine, medical statistics, epidemiology and experimental medicine. As for the National Health System, the Institute manages 130 beds, providing for some 4000 admissions yearly (2003), 900 heart surgery operations, 850 interventional procedures and more than 40,000 external patients receiving treatments at the Institute facilities.

On the second day the visiting group moved to Pontedera. The Pont Tech Consortium was introduced by Director Mr Roberto Lanzara. Pont-Tech is a consortium for Industrial Research and Technology Transfer resulting from a joint initiative of public and private bodies. Its mission is to promote research activities and technology transfer from research towards industrial application. "Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna" (SSSA) - a public Research University with a special status in the world of Italian Universities - is one of Pont-Tech main shareholders and its leading scientific partner. The close proximity and strict operational co-operation among Pont-Tech and Polo Sant'Anna Valdera - i. e. SSSA's laboratories in Pontedera - are the backbone of a regional network of research centres, excellence laboratories, incubators, infrastructures aiming to stimulate innovation, R&D spillover, enterprise start-up and spin-off firms.

Ms Cecilia Laschi, Associate Professor of Biomedical Engineering at the SSSA introduced the delegation to the Sant'Anna Valdera Campus. Hosted by former Piaggio depositories the Campus has a number of laboratories designed for cutting-edge scientific and

technological research in several sectors, including biomedicine, microengineering, robotics, mechatronics, virtual reality, information technology and biotechnology and represents a formidable technology transfer system aimed at creating innovative new companies in several advanced technology sectors through the valorisation of the youth, creativity and skills of carefully selected students trained in its own research labs.

The Sant'Anna Valdera Campus and Pont-Tech work jointly, the latter acting as an intermediary between the Sant'Anna School and local interests, which essentially means running an incubator of newly born companies.

Within the Sant'Anna Valdera Campus, the DISTRICT delegation visited the Advanced Robotics Technology and System Laboratory (ARTS Lab), the Centre for Applied Research in Micro and Nano Engineering Laboratory (CRIM) and the Laboratory of Simultaneous Presence, Telepresence and Virtual Presence (PERCRO).

The ARTS Lab conducts theoretical and experimental research on robotics and bioengineering, along with applied research and technological innovation, particularly in the biomedical field with a strong tendency toward integrating heterogeneous bodies of knowledge, both of a scientific and humanistic nature, in order to study the theoretical and practical problems associated with the development of advanced robotic systems.

The CRIM laboratory studies design methods and manufacturing technologies for microcomponents, microsystems and micromachines in the dimensional range between one centimeter and a few microns. CRIM conceives and creates devices and integrated miniaturized machines for a wide range of applications, the majority of which are in the biomedical sector, such as autonomous microendoscopes that integrate microcameras, sensors for diagnostics and monitoring,

intelligent actuators capable of moving in environments that are otherwise difficult to access.

Research activity in the PERCRO laboratory focuses on control components and on presence sensing in remote operation and virtual environments. Robot and virtual environment technologies are the main areas of research, which includes the theoretical and practical study of the following topics: haptic interfaces; exploration and manipulation of virtual objects; remote manipulation; visualization of highly-complex virtual environments; and aspects of human interaction in robot systems.

The Pontedera area and history are closely linked to Piaggio. Established in 1884 by Rinaldo Piaggio, the Piaggio Group is one of the world's top manufacturers of two and three-wheels motor vehicles. A general presentation was followed by a tour in the factory. Exceptionally, the DISTRICT delegation was allowed to visit the assembly line (production chain).

Piaggio Group own research activities take place in five centres located around the world in Italy, Spain, India and China. The pursuit of excellence is based on anticipating client needs by creating products which are technically, stylistically and functionally innovative. The Group's aim is to be the world leader as regards "Made in Italy" light mobility, in terms of design, creativity and tradition, and internationally recognised as the reference company in Europe.

The tour ended at the Piaggio Museum - a real homage to the culture of mobility - allowing visitors to discover the history of the company together with the development of industry, economy and society.

The 11 sub-projects: halfway appraisal of results

The second half of 2006 saw subprojects starting implementing their plans. Highlights of their activities and initiatives were provided by the advancement reports due at the end of the semester. A review of the same is provided hereafter. According to the reports the first six months of activity were an exciting experience of intense networking, both for long-experienced actors as well as for neophytes of European projects. All in all, the impression from this kind of interregional cooperation initiative is very positive.

Several projects - such as **CLINIC** (Co-operation Linking Interactive Networks and Innovative Clusters) - launched on study tour programmes to develop mutual acquaintance. Study tours both within and without the circle of partners are being implemented. Sharing experiences and methodologies strengthened the network of partners.

Some projects - such as **ETI-NET** (Innovation Perspectives for Industrial Cluster and Network Initiatives) - started an in-depth discussion to lay the methodological foundation and conceptual basis for a commonly agreed analytical framework. Assessing the innovation potential of clusters and networks in the regions was the first step. All partners engaged in collecting data and information about clusters, networks and the economic context in the regions. Each partner established a network of cluster experts in its region.

Projects dealing with foresight - such as **FORECO** (Foreseeing Competitiveness) - are collaborating with experienced partners such as the Coventry University and the Espira Growth Centre to implement their studies. The methodology to financially and organizationally analyze enterprises was first discussed by the partners. After collectively reviewing the preliminary results,

the second phase of the project will deliver tools for medium to long-term foresight analysis.

The **INNOTRAD** (Innovating Tradition) project saw the University of Wolverhampton launching on a pilot project with the leather cluster in coordination with researchers at PIN. The pilot initiative aimed at creating a cluster of five companies working on technology transfer programmes with the Centre of Engineering Excellence at Wolverhampton. The goal is to analyze the impact of specific technologies on product development and innovation - and identify barriers to its implementation. The pilot outcomes will transfer to other sectors. The second pilot in textiles is still being planned. The website to support the clusters is being updated and made available for companies and partners in all involved regions.

A questionnaire to evaluate positioning in the textile/clothing sectors and the regional context has been sent out by **INTECHTEX** (European Regional Strategy for Innovation in Technical Textiles) to companies and research institutes both within and without the circle of partner regions. An English database with multilingual search tools - following the PERFECT-LINK/DATEC and EUROTILREGION databases - was developed and installed at STFI. All partners may access the information in the database. Improvement and translation of the database will continue in 2007. Search tools are currently available in the member's area of the project's website. 396 companies (Saxony 182, Tuscany 62, Västra Götaland 57 and West Midlands 95) are in the database, with 916 application areas, 565 business index entries and 543 NACE code entries.

The first step of the **PICTURE** (Promoting Innovative Clusters Through Urban Regeneration) project established the methodological framework. Different facets of the context

analysis were dealt by each partner separately - IRIS dealt with logistics, DSE and University of Birmingham with innovative clusters, DSPS with social issues and Urban SpA with the accompanying physical transformations. The preliminary analysis of the urban, economical and social transformations of the city - i.e., Prato - were shared and discussed by all partners.

Partners of the **RICE** (Regional Innovation for a Competitive Europe) project collected information about regional structures, research resources and networks dealing with renewable raw materials / health and well-being / bio-energy. Companies, authorities, associations and institutions in the above sectors were contacted and are currently cooperating with the project. Review of regional resources for novel / renewable materials considered: current situation, statistics, application fields, processing facilities, legislation. Data collection about renewable raw materials / health and well-being / bio-energy included: regional / national research institutions and experts; regional / national associations / networks / agencies / political authorities and experts; regional SMEs resources and technologies; German and European Information platforms and portals.

SEARCH (Scanning and Evaluating Activities for Research Commercialization Handovers) partners developed a consortia agreement allowing for structure of a handover arena and the creation of various interview and disclosure templates. This will also be the basis for a database of potential commercial projects. Intellectual property structures have been discussed during two-monthly meetings. In order to identify some 25 ideas and 7 products/companies to market, the partners collected more than 95 invention disclosures, which are currently being analyzed for selection to the 25 ideas. 2 ideas

have been already identified and handed-over to a pre-incubator for potential company formation to the marketplace. In January 2007, some more 12 ideas will be selected for incubation towards the potential creation of the 7 companies or projects. 2 disclosures have been identified as potential educational case studies, and have had initial assessment for development.

The **SERIOUS GAMES** (Serious Games Cluster and Business Network) developed a demonstrator for training on fire-fighting. In the next months, experiments, evaluation and analysis of the game will be done: a number of Universities have been identified in order to assist with product testing and evaluation. The University of Coventry has developed a beta test version of the game. A study report about the serious games sector in Sweden, Europe and USA has been produced as well as an expertise database which is now forming a Serious Games Network.

After screening and selecting spin-off candidates from regional databases, the **STIM-SME** (Innovation Perspectives for Industrial Cluster and Network Initiatives) project contacted existing spin-offs in the regional incubators to evaluate their experience. 28 potential spin-offs are currently being analysed. Auditing of the spin-offs will start at the beginning of 2007 through interviews and assessments by the STIM-SME partners. To this end partners have established a Diagnostic Kit. Outstanding spin-offs will be selected for commercialisation in spring 2007.

The most significant result achieved by **TECHNOLOGYMALL** (Development of a virtual Mall for active technology marketing and international business development) so far is the development and implementation of an Internet-based platform. Potential exhibitors have been introduced to this online platform,

wherein they can register and enter their company, product or technology profiles. A first set of nearly 400 company profiles has been entered and will serve as critical mass for gathering more entries. The companies have been invited to provide additional graphics, pictures and video clips: this material is being added. New templates for profiles of products, R&D providers as well as technologies have been developed and can be used for online entries. The ongoing implementation of helpful links and information will help to draw more visitors to the website. Among this, a new dictionary will allow to translate more than 1500 key terms of mechanical engineering into English, German and Russian.

Commission presents the state of the EU regions and launches debate on the future of cohesion policy

30 May 2007

The economic, social and territorial situation of the enlarged Union and its 268 regions is illustrated for the first time in the Fourth Cohesion Report presented by the European Commission. The report contains a detailed analysis of the position of the regions in terms of GDP, productivity and employment, identifying a series of challenges with which Member States and regions will be confronted in the coming years.

The Fourth Cohesion Report also provides a first assessment of the impact of European cohesion policy during the 2000-2006 programming period and of preparations for the new 2007- 2013 period. The report includes 10 questions to kick off the debate inside and outside the European institutions on the future of this major policy area.

Further info available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/reports/cohesion4/index_en.htm

DISTRICT Workshop "Communicate Innovation"

7 June 2007 Prato

How to communicate innovation? To communicate innovative products, services, technologies, or business processes is one among many tasks of any communication department. A discussant panel of journalists, researchers, entrepreneurs and university teachers will explore the use of the word innovation in the Italian and European press, starting from a thematic research by the University of Florence. The workshop will be held on Thursday 7 June 2007 at the Auditorium of the Pecci Museum in Prato.

Further info available at: <http://www.district-rfo.eu/news.php#Anchor-83>

DISTRICT at work: Subprojects mid-term evaluation workshop

19 June 2007, City Council Hall, Prato

Tuscany Region - Lead Partner of the DISTRICT RFO - in coordination with Prato Municipality organizes the interregional workshop "The DISTRICT Regional Framework Operation at work: INNOVATION PATHWAYS AND KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY" to be held in Prato on the 19th of June, 2007.

By analyzing the first results of the DISTRICT subprojects, the workshop will deal with new trends towards more globalised markets and increasing links between research, knowledge and technology, learn from government policy experiences and share best practices. It will examine promising new policy options to better link knowledge and business communities and help turning technologies into market opportunities.

The workshop's sessions will see the analysis of subprojects experiences, presented by Subproject Lead Partners, for each thematic component. The final round table - seeing the participation of European, national and regional actors - will dwell on future perspectives of Interregional Cooperation in the new European programming period.

Further info available at: <http://www.district-rfo.eu/news.php#Anchor-82>

EU Interregional Cooperation Forum 2007: Celebrating INTERREG IIIC - Launching INTERREG IVC

20-21 September 2007, Lisbon

The 2007 Interregional Cooperation Forum will take place on 20 and 21 September, in Lisbon, Portugal.

The event will mark the launch of INTERREG IVC, the new programme for interregional cooperation, and show how INTERREG IIIC is already helping Europe's regions work together and improve regional development.

Speakers include Danuta Hübner, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, and Francisco Nunes Correia, Portuguese Minister for Environment, Spatial Planning and Regional Development. The European Parliament and Committee of the Regions are also invited.

Up to 800 representatives of local and regional authorities and other public bodies are expected to come to Lisbon from across the EU. The forum will bring together organisations interested in tackling similar issues, help them build and promote ideas for new projects, and show them how to apply for INTERREG IVC funding.

INTERREG IVC, which runs for the period 2007-2013, is similar to its predecessor INTERREG IIIC in that it helps regions from across the EU to share experience and work together on improving regional policies.

A new feature of INTERREG IVC is the focus on certain themes, which are based on the Lisbon and Gothenburg agendas and grouped under two priorities: "Innovation and the knowledge economy" and "The environment and risk prevention". There is also a strong emphasis on capitalisation, and the transfer and take-up of project results - in particular good practices identified - by regions in their own regional development programmes.

Further info available at: http://www.interreg3c.net/sixcms/detail.php?id=10737&_interregbase=nozonenohome