Conference Proceedings

Regions for economic change

Sharing excellence

25–26 February 2008
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Background
This second annual spring conference in the context of the ‘Regions for Economic Change’ initiative had at its heart the process of exchanging knowledge and best practices in order to promote European innovation and growth through networking activities.

The core target group of these conferences are the Structural Funds managing authorities. At this point in time, when the Operational Programmes have been approved and are being launched and the first calls for projects under the INTERREG IVC and URBACT II programmes are closed, it was seen as vital to look more closely at the ‘two-way bridge’ between the networks and the Regional Operational Programmes, the building of which is one of the key aims of the Regions for Economic Change initiative.

Now a well established format, the conference comprised three workshop sessions, each in turn proposing three parallel workshops. The nine workshops focused on the main theme of exchanging and sharing knowledge and good practice and their actual implementation. Five of these were constructed to give concrete examples and promote discussion in key sectors for regional and urban policy: energy, health, transport, demographic change, and adaptation to globalisation. A further workshop aimed at showcasing experiences from the Committee of the Regions’ Lisbon Monitoring Platform, a network project for assessing the impact of the renewed Lisbon strategy at regional level. Two more workshops focused on the results from the pilot ‘fast track’ networks under the INTERREG IIIC and URBACT I programmes, while a final workshop discussed the concept of sharing good practice in the light of experiences with the RegioStars Awards, presented for the first time this year during the conference.

A new element at this conference was the availability of ‘Networking Corners’, thematic areas made available to conference delegates and designed to host informal exchanges on topics of interest and also provide the opportunity to interact with speakers from the various parallel workshop sessions.

Conference Programme
The four plenary sessions at the conference saw a series of senior speakers introduce and give their informed views on some of the core topics tackled by the conference.

A bridge between good ideas and concrete action: Regions for Economic Change
Commissioner Hübner illustrated how the Regions for Economic Change initiative can actively contribute to mobilising local and regional resources against the global challenges Europe is facing. She contended that these challenges can only be faced head on by sharing both good and bad experiences and learning from them, transforming these lessons into action, and mobilising jointly to deliver these actions. Regions for Economic Change acts on each of these three steps by reinforcing the work of the INTERREG IVC and the URBACT II programmes, building a solid ‘two-way bridge’ between the networking activities and the Regional Operational Programmes, and drawing together the stakeholders, network partners, Managing Authorities of the Operational Programmes and the Commission itself to collaborate within its ‘fast track’ option. Communication and dissemination of results is also key, said Commissioner Hübner, and the conference itself, as well as the newly created RegioStars Awards (cf. page 15), offer examples of the work produced within Regions for Economic Change in this sense.

Sharing Excellence, a key element of a dynamic Cohesion policy
The initiative was praised by Mr Jan Olbrycht, Vice-Chair of the REGI Committee in the European Parliament, and highlighted as an example of the active role the Commission is taking in the provision of instruments to support innovation and creativity and the implementation of good ideas. Promotion and backing for networks, argued Professor Knut Koschatzky, Head of the Department of Regions and Market Dynamics at the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research, is a cornerstone of Regional Policy, aiming at the sustainable creation of excellence and wealth at regional level. It also allows building on the diversity of regions and exploiting their individual characteristics and potential. Networking, he went on, although not an objective in itself, facilitates mutual learning, enabling the capitalisation of knowledge.
Partnership is an instrument for innovation and creativity

Professor Koschatzky explained how partnership can contribute to alleviating the uncertainties inherent to the innovation process, asserting at the same time that interactive learning and economic exchange in networks are an important policy objective at regional level. At this level, he added, new competencies are to be developed in order to take full advantage of the innovation orientation of Cohesion policy. On innovation, Mr Marko Starman, State Secretary for Local Self-Government and Regional Policy in Slovenia, illustrated how regional authorities are in a privileged position to make the most of the complex mixture of ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ factors that make up regional innovative capacity, which needs to be acknowledged and has a crucial bearing on growth. Mr Žiga Turk, Minister for Development and Growth and Slovenian National Lisbon Coordinator, went even further: he outlined the global context in which European regions are operating, addressing the expanding significance of Asia in the field of innovation, and advocated that Europe go beyond innovation, which he regarded as no longer sufficient, and develop creativity instead. Creativity, he argued, adds value and meaning to any new product and is a powerful economic resource. Regions, again through Cohesion policy, have access to instruments allowing them to build the infrastructures and facilities that can help to educate, attract and retain the talents needed to concentrate creativity, illustrating how creativity is thus being integrated into the current update of the Lisbon Strategy.

Regions as crucial actors in the multi-level delivery of the Lisbon Strategy

This latter topic, with its relevance for innovation, was at the heart of the address delivered by President Van den Brande of the Committee of the Regions. He underlined that, within the Lisbon monitoring exercise being conducted by the Committee, a majority of European regions and cities regard innovation as a top priority and that coordination between regions and cities and the upper echelons of government, as well as interregional cooperation, are vital elements of policymaking. He also stressed the need for synchronised agendas at the local, regional, national and European levels in order to deliver the Lisbon goals. The role of Cohesion policy in this respect through the Structural Funds was echoed by Mr Starman, who also agreed with President Van den Brande on the importance of the regional dimension for broader ownership of the Lisbon Strategy.

The challenges in the energy sector are opportunities for leveraging and unleashing the potential of every region

Finally, Commissioner Piebalgs, in illustrating the wealth of European initiatives on tackling the energy and climatic challenges Europe is facing, stressed how regions and cities have enormous potential in this area when it comes to developing and devising new approaches to create, adopt and foster adoption and creation among other stakeholders of sound policies, innovative actions, economic opportunities and virtuous behaviour. If this is crucial to reaching goals in energy efficiency, sharing their knowledge and experience is equally important in terms of achieving sustainable energy targets and reaping the social and economic benefits of the synergies that the process brings about.

"The Regions for Economic Change initiative can actively contribute to mobilising local and regional resources against the global challenges Europe is facing." Commissioner Hübner
The workshop was opened by Mr Andrzej Ryś, who started by offering the participants a few thought-provoking questions and statements, the first being ‘Health means Wealth?!’ describing key issues concerning the complex bidirectional relationship between health and affluence and the importance of how to measure correctly the impact, inputs and outputs of health. Investing in health promotes economic growth through reduced health care costs, reduced welfare payments and increased productivity through reduced morbidity. A healthy society is a more confident and more productive society.

The health of an individual depends on many factors: genetic endowments, lifestyle, living and working conditions (access to and use of health care, education, wealth, housing, and occupation) and more general socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions. Several of these determinants of health can be influenced by public policies.

There is a direct effect of health on the economy. It has long been recognised that increased national wealth is associated with improved health, but it is only recently that the contribution of better health to economic growth has been recognised. Policymakers who are interested in improving economic results would have a strong case for considering investment in health as one of their options for meeting their economic objectives. Health is not merely seen as an end in itself, but — in addition — can be considered a means that brings further benefits, especially to the economy.

The precise policies that Member States should consider will depend on their individual circumstances. However, they all face the challenge of establishing mechanisms that can assess the health needs confronting their populations, define interventions that respond effectively to those needs, and assess progress towards better health.

At EU level, between 2007 and 2013 about €5.14 billion (1.5% of total Cohesion policy funding) have been earmarked to support health infrastructure and a further €5 billion for e-services for citizens and in support of e-health projects. Closing the gaps with Member States will contribute to fostering regional economic development and reduce health inequalities between countries and regions.

Discussion

Professor Jonathan Watson introduced the participants to HealthClusterNet, a network of European regions supported by the INTERREG IIIC initiative. The network comprises 13 European regional partners who are working together to improve the contribution made by health care sector spending to regional development.
The project aims to build on evidence that, in general, health and economic activity are directly linked and that maximising regional health care sector spending therefore improves regional economic performance and the health of the regional population.

HealthClusterNet has four work streams: local procurement practice to help create dynamic local businesses; inclusive employment opportunities for vulnerable social groups; affordable capital investment models and cross-sector investments that really work; and finally innovation markets promoting regional added value. Each work stream comprises a network workshop, regional activity and policy forum and includes bilateral visits and study tours between regions. Network members are working with a broad range of local regional partners, including local business groups, to ensure maximum benefit. It is important to bear in mind that there is no ‘one size fits all’ agenda as regions are at different starting points when joining the network. Any network should facilitate the sharing of information, experiences and ideas between partner regions. It is also important to have a common strategic vision in relation to operational priorities for the network.

Mr Tony Ellis gave an interesting presentation of the public health network for Cheshire and Merseyside (ChaMPs). ChaMPs is a partner within HealthClusterNet. It works with the NHS, local authorities (municipalities), voluntary organisations, and other statutory and non-statutory organisations. Its function is to maximise the sharing of public health expertise and use of specialist knowledge while minimising duplication of effort. ChaMPs also runs a training programme for the professional development of public health specialists and practitioners. When everyone contributes, everyone benefits as we build partnerships to improve the health of the population. By working smarter together, we share knowledge and expertise, develop effective professional relationships and learn together. The discussion once again showed that the exchange of good practice is a key point for any network and that ‘one size can never fit all’. ChaMPs has learned that partnerships indeed start from different positions and that it is necessary to spend time with the different members. Finally, communication, i.e. telling the story to a larger audience, is part of the network’s public relations.

Ms Sandrine Raffin outlined the EPODE (Ensemble, Prévenons l’Obésité Des Enfants – Together, we can prevent obesity in children) methodology to prevent childhood obesity, involving local stakeholders in a sustainable way. The EPODE philosophy focuses on a thorough awareness of the obesity issue (no stigmatisation!), a positive, concrete and step-by-step learning process of healthy diet and physical activity, and a long-term programme aimed at changing the environment and daily habits, thereby changing behaviour. With the family and the city as its core focus, EPODE involves all stakeholders, fostering multi-stakeholder dynamics. Its partners include a number of ministries, associations and private companies (with a strict ethical charter). The Mayors’ Club (Association des Maires de France) works actively to promote the programme. Based on its great success, the EPODE programme has now been transferred to other countries and regions with different languages and cultures, e.g. VIASANO in Belgium and THAO Salud Infantil in Spain. EPODE recognises five steps for transferring the programme to a new country and/or region. New candidate countries or regions are welcome.

Ms Raffin also agreed that sharing best practices and continuous communication is at the heart of networking.

Conclusions

• Networking partners need to trust each other.
• In general it is important to learn from each other: good ideas spread like wildfire in the right environment.
• Group dynamics exist.
• There is no ‘one size fits all’ agenda in networking, nor any standard recipe for success.
• Communication is essential for effective networking (tell the story to a larger audience).
• Networking partners start from different positions (different regional realities).
• A healthier Europe: it is important to have a shared long-term strategic perspective to change both the environment and behaviour.
• The key to success for the Structural Funds is through local and regional involvement.

Mr Ryś concluded the workshop by summing up the discussions and inviting the participants to take part in the informal networking corners during the conference.

Tony Ellis
Mr Gussetti, Director from the Committee of the Regions, and Mr Forti presented the resolution, ‘The Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs paradox’, based on the Committee’s report in support of the Growth and Jobs Strategy. They explained that this report came in response to the request issued at the spring 2006 European Council, which welcomed the initiatives of the Committee of the Regions in support of the Partnership for Growth and Jobs.

The Committee’s representatives stressed that the effects of the revised Lisbon Strategy had to be assessed at the local and regional level. They underlined the key role that regions and cities play as economic actors.

In their presentations they called for the closer involvement of regional and local authorities in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of National Reform Programmes and suggested that the spring European Council confirmed the CoR’s responsibility for issuing a regular report on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy at local and regional level and its follow-up.

Mr Forti suggested a Europe-wide awareness campaign, in cooperation with all the European institutions, to foster awareness and backing for the Lisbon Strategy, notably at local and regional level. He also welcomed the active efforts of local and regional authorities to design solutions and strategies best suited to their constituencies. Thus, the role to be played by local and regional administrations was even more crucial in this context.

They highlighted that 95% of all European regions and cities had an integrated innovation policy. In their interventions they also mentioned territorial cohesion as a third objective of the Treaty alongside social and economic cohesion. “This should strengthen the role of regions and cities at the European level”, Mr Gussetti stated. The territorial dialogue would provide a unique opportunity to convey the concerns of regional and local authorities to the European Council and the Commission. Territorial cooperation in all its various forms (cross-border, transnational, interregional and intra-regional) would play an important role in most Lisbon-related actions. In fact, approximately 75% of all actions carried out by local and regional authorities had a territorial-cooperation dimension.

Finally they both referred to the upcoming EU Budget Review 2008. According to the CoR the EU policymakers, in reflecting on the future of the EU Cohesion Policy beyond 2013, need to better address the specific territorial needs, challenges and opportunities of Regions and cities that are joining forces to collectively implement the Lisbon Strategy, enabling a fruitful exchange of experience and best practice.
**Discussion and conclusions**

Speakers from Sweden, Yorkshire, Hungary and the city of Munich presented strategies and best practice projects in interregional cooperation and networking.

Ms Elisabeth Langgren Lundov, Project Manager from the Sörmland Region (SE) in her intervention presented a Swedish-Italian network. She pointed out that "The EU worked in the same way as we do in day-to-day politics, and the Lisbon Strategy was a good example of this". She underlined that Regions and cities could help make the Lisbon Strategy more visible to the public. Public investment within the framework of the Lisbon priorities was, in her view, mainly implemented at sub-national level. The main conclusion of her presentation was "Capitalising on innovative projects requires networking and exchanges of best practice."

Mr Reza Zadeh, Director European Innovation, Yorkshire Forward, Yorkshire and Humber Regional Development Agency (UK) presented the European network for European regions research and innovation network. His main message was that "Innovation was an engine of prosperity." Innovation is crucial for wealth and prosperity. Local and regional authorities play a major role in the financing of a broad series of policies, chief among them being innovation policy. Strategic coordination has not yet been achieved in all policy areas. Coordination of all governance levels should increase the overall efficiency of these investments, he argued. "Territorial cooperation is what links the imperatives of cohesion with the Lisbon Strategy, as can clearly be seen on the ground", he said.

Mr Norbert Grasselli, Director, INNOVA Eszak-Alföld Regional Innovation Agency (HU) presented the network of Innovating Regions in Europe (IRE). It provides methodological help to develop the Regional Innovation Strategy. It offers an opportunity for 47 organizations to start international cooperation. The Network of Eastern European Border Regions (NEEBOR) was also mentioned as a challenging networking instrument. One of his main recommendations was to "invest in talent and innovation will follow."

**Mr Raymond Saller**, from the City of Munich, emphasised the role that cities play in driving economic development, supporting the creation of jobs, innovation and employment. Additionally, cities were also key locations for removing obstacles to growth and jobs — notably social exclusion and environmental degradation. They are also places where specialised services are provided — such as higher education institutions, hospitals and major cultural attractions. Based on these remarks he considered Cities as the main drivers of innovation and research. They provide the setting for universities and public services of economic interest. Regions and cities are engaging in virtually all policy areas commonly perceived as 'Lisbon-type areas': employment, business environment, environment, and human capital rank among the most important issues for regions and cities today, together with innovation and increasing the competitiveness of the industrial base. Regions and cities can help to make the Lisbon Strategy more visible to the public. Public investment in the framework of Lisbon priorities is mainly done on the sub-national level. Local and regional authorities play a major role in the financing of a broad series of policies, first and foremost, innovation policy. "Strategic coordination did not yet exist in all policy areas. Coordination of all governance levels can increase the overall efficiency of these investments", the representative of the City of Munich explained to the audience.
Outline
This workshop highlighted the growing importance of demographic balances and how regions can respond to these challenges. **Mr David Dion** introduced the workshop with a presentation of the challenges from a European standpoint. Regions can learn how to respond to different demographic challenges by drawing on the experiences of other regions. This is why three participants from the ‘Age Alliance Network − Working for Older Workers’ (a network established under the EQUAL initiative) were asked to present their concrete actions in tackling some of these challenges.

Discussion
David Dion placed demographic change within the context of the Lisbon Agenda and its objectives in terms of active ageing. In the European Union a combination of low fertility and longer life expectancy will lead to substantial increases in the number of people aged 65 and over, while the number of people of working age will start to decline in the near future.

The Lisbon Agenda has set a number of targets relating directly to this demographic challenge. It aims to increase the exit age, in other words the effective average age at which people stop working, from 60 in 2000 to 65 by 2010. There has been some progress towards this target, but much more needs to be done since, by 2005, the average had only increased by one year. The second target is to increase the employment rate among people aged 55 to 64 to 50% by 2010. Progress towards this goal is stronger, having increased from 37% in 2000 to 43.5% in 2006. With a little extra effort the target of 50% could be reached by 2010. This goal is particularly important, because the proportion of older workers within the working-age population will continue to grow over the next 15 years.

The combination of a strong increase in the proportion of older workers with a substantial decrease in the total working-age population will have particular repercussions for the 10 new central and eastern European Member States and also for Portugal, Spain and Germany.

Older workers tend to have fewer qualifications and are also less likely to participate in lifelong learning. Given these demographic trends, it is of paramount importance to ensure that older workers have better access to appropriate e-training in order to keep their skills up to date.

The three speakers from the ‘Age Alliance Network − Working for Older Workers’ gave practical examples of how older workers can be incorporated better within today’s labour market.
Ms Irene Heller introduced the network and spoke about UK experiences. This transnational partnership was formed in 2005 and includes members from Austria, Germany, Poland and the UK. In the UK one of the most successful actions has been ‘Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL)’. This provides older workers with official recognition of the skills they have acquired ‘on the job’. University involvement in this accreditation programme has enhanced its credibility. Official recognition of their skills can really help older workers to find a new or a better job. Some of the practical policy messages to emerge from this network were that employers need to show commitment and understand the benefits, and that increasing employment among older workers can be achieved more effectively by focusing on demand rather than on supply. Echoing the previous presentation, Irene Heller also emphasised the clear need to promote access to education and training for older workers tailored to their needs.

Mr Jürgen Brandt shared the most effective actions taken in Schwerin, Germany, to promote employment among workers aged over 50. Two actions were seen as clearly effective. The first was the ‘Job Mentors’ scheme, under which companies would help job seekers to find employment by showing them how to look for work and present themselves better to potential future employers. The second scheme, which had never been tried in Western Mecklenburg, was called ‘Patchworking’. This basically allows an older worker to ‘patch’ several part-time jobs together to create a full-time occupation. Partly as a result of these actions, the employment rate among people aged over 50 has been increasing in Western Mecklenburg over recent years. The German experience has raised two important issues. Firstly, employment agencies and employers should be ‘sensitised’ to the issue of increasing employment for older workers. Secondly, education and vocational training should take into account the needs of older workers. Looking to the future, Mr Brandt saw several more challenges, particularly among immigrant workers and in the new Member States.

The final presentation was given by Ms Kamila Jeżowska. She gave an insight into issues in a region where overall employment rates are much lower than in the UK and unemployment, particularly among older workers, is very high. She focused on a project called ‘job-coaching for people over 45’.

Conclusions

This workshop has shown the magnitude of the demographic challenges in the European Union as well as how these challenges differ between the Member States and the regions. The examples from the Age Alliance Network and the subsequent debate showed clearly that regions are important players within the Lisbon Agenda and that they can increase the employment rate among older workers through targeted and integrated actions. The networking facilitated through the EQUAL programme has not only taught regions how other regions are dealing with these issues, but also shown them new ways in which they can improve their own actions aimed at older workers.
LEARNING LESSONS FROM 'CLUSTERS LINKED OVER EUROPE':
THE PILOT ‘FAST TRACK’ PROJECT UNDER INTERREG IIIC

Outline
CLOE (Clusters Linked Over Europe) is a European network on clusters created in 2004 as an INTERREG IIIC network, led by the city of Karlsruhe’s Economic Development Department. CLOE gained prominence courtesy of solid branding efforts on networking and cluster organisations. In the first phase of the network (up until June 2007), 10 partners from eight regions developed sound working methods and produced a ‘Cluster Management Guide’ now translated into several languages.

CLOE was selected as a pilot project to test aspects of the ‘fast track’ approach of the Commission’s ‘Regions for Economic Change’ (RfEC) initiative. It was enlarged to 18 partners from 15 regions and 14 countries representing 23 active clusters.

This workshop took stock of the experience and working methods developed among the partners, the managing authorities and staff from several Commission DGs (REGIO, ENTR, INFSO, RTD) to highlight the lessons learnt.

Discussion
The Chairman, Mr Jean-Noël Durvy, introduced the topic by presenting the main features of cluster policy. While the concept was not new, clusters are of pivotal importance for regional economic development. Regions and Member States take increasing interest in clusters that promote excellence and are innovation drivers for all firms as they contribute to implementing the triple helix model needed for innovation. Public policies on this issue must facilitate these processes, but not directly intervene in the market.

DG ENTR focuses on providing networks and platforms for transnational cooperation to support better policy-making and delivery for SMEs by fostering mutual learning and the exchange of ideas and experiences. The Commission is currently preparing a communication on clusters.

Mr John Walsh introduced the main thrust of the revised Cohesion policy, now making it the largest source of EU financing in support of regional innovation for the period 2007-13. He mentioned the close link between EU regional policy and innovation, and within that the twin-track approach to regional clusters and to transnational cluster cooperation. Member States and regions have allocated €86 billion (i.e. 25 % of the total Cohesion policy envelope) to innovation (rising to €99 billion after adding the miscellaneous spending category ‘other support to firms’). Within these activities, support to clusters and cluster organisations plays a key role in channelling specialised services to, and promoting innovation in, businesses.
In CLOE’s 10-month fast track pilot phase relations were established between the partners, Managing Authorities, Commission services and other relevant stakeholders within each region. The joint steering committee created was invaluable in order to foster relational capital, establish and check benchmarks and introduce a peer review culture. These aspects are the main features of the RfEC initiative. This pilot experiment allowed these to be tested successfully to the satisfaction of all the partners, who appreciated the support received from the Commission.

Mr Ralf Eichhorn spoke about the network’s public-private partnership philosophy and its challenging role as lead partner in the ‘fast track’ projects. He mentioned the positive role in terms of matching and promotion within the 23 clusters from a range of regions with different cluster levels, cluster activities and cluster potential. He also explained how events (high-level conferences, visits, staff exchanges involving companies and cluster managers) fostered transnational global cooperation, including with China and India.

He highlighted the fact that the Lead Partner’s duties include structuring the deliverables, enforcing the deadlines, ensuring increased transparency, producing analytical summaries and overviews. He also reported that the fast track had enabled widespread recognition for CLOE, useful in achieving clusters of excellence.

Ms Frédérique Barellon illustrated how it is possible to “close the circle between managing authorities and project partners”. The project partner, representing business, is Lyon Chamber of Commerce.

On an initiative from the Rhône-Alpes Region Representation in Brussels, and with Government agreement, the RfEC clause was included in the regional Operational Programme. To create the strong delegation requested by RfEC, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the partner and the authorities representing the Rhône-Alpes Region and the French Government. This led to enhanced dialogue between stakeholders and to the use of the CLOE action plan for better integration of national and regional cluster policy, which is quite advanced in this region. CLOE also allowed the benchmarking of this region vis-à-vis others, reinforcing interregional links between cluster initiatives.

The final two speakers illustrated cluster strategies in two very different regions: Upper Austria, and Ostrava (CZ). Ms Lucia Seel explained how 10 years of successful cluster development had brought increased economic growth, internationalisation (27% of Austrian exports) and low unemployment to the region. She also noted that CLOE had fostered deeper cooperation with the Managing Authorities, constructive dialogue with the Commission on cluster policy, and greater transnational cooperation between clusters.

Mr Petr Nemeth outlined reconversion efforts in the industrial region of Moravia-Silesia based on the attraction of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). He outlined how cluster initiatives can help attract large international firms to this location. Participation in CLOE, mainly through organised staff exchanges, enabled the rapid identification of best practices, which in turn provided instruction for the partner’s action plan and fostered transnational cooperation between clusters.

Conclusions
Regional representatives, partners and the Commission all agreed that, as a pilot, the CLOE project has succeeded in testing the main features of the ‘fast track’ option provided by the RfEC initiative.

The speakers agreed that CLOE, by sharing different approaches, has helped in the following ways:

- start or consolidate dialogue within regions between the institutional stakeholders, in relation to which Commission support was pivotal;
- rapidly create an atmosphere conducive to information exchange, forging contacts, networking and cooperation encompassing cluster organisations, associated universities and businesses;
- allow knowledge sharing, technology transfer and cooperation links through the public-private partnership;
- enable the partners to achieve increased national and regional recognition, notwithstanding the challenging nature of the project.

The partnership among the relevant Commission services also enabled the establishment of ambitious benchmarks along with a peer review culture within the network.
The workshop focused on the fact that today’s social and economic trends are putting increasing pressure on enterprises to remain prosperous and competitive. Globalisation combined with demographic changes and rapid technological innovations mean that companies have to anticipate and manage changes in all areas of their business. They have to usher in new forms of work organisation, introduce new products and services, and monitor closely shifts in customer demand. Effectively anticipating and managing change also entails investing in human capital.

At the territorial level, the manner in which businesses adapt swiftly to change has a direct impact on the labour market, economic prosperity and social cohesion between regions. This is particularly the case where regions have in the past been dependent on more traditional industries and sectors and/or have experienced significant demographic shifts. Therefore, regions also need to anticipate and manage change, bringing together key stakeholders to develop and implement appropriate policy responses.

To illustrate this, one particular network – EURODECO, established under the ESF EQUAL initiative – was studied in depth. The network comprises six partner regions from the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Poland and Spain. The network has been highly effective in establishing interregional working groups on various adaptability topics, leading to the production of joint publications for dissemination purposes. Of the six participating regions, three participated in the actual workshop.

Discussion

Mr Armindo Silva set out the framework for the meeting: practical examples of adapting to globalisation; the role of Lifelong Learning, and business reconversion. The EC plays an active part in this regard. The role of networking can be highlighted using the example of the EURODECO network.

Ms Sabine Boehmert pictured the challenges of globalisation, the EC’s approach to the issue, and the potential role of the Structural Funds (ESF and ERDF) in anticipating and managing economic change. She also underlined the part played by Member States and their regions in this respect. In addition, she surveyed forthcoming EC activities: publication of the inaugural European Restructuring Report and of sector studies and said, “Change is to be embraced as a permanent phenomenon.”

Mrs Maria-João Rauch explained the workings of the EURODECO network within the context of the EQUAL programme, now mainstreamed into ESF. She described EURODECO’s six partners. The
What was the purpose of this initiative?
The awards are part of an integrated initiative to reinforce the transfer of good practices between Europe’s regions that we call ‘Regions for Economic Change’. I knew that there were good innovative practices in regional development which were tested and developed. I have had the privilege to visit many such projects. I believe that there is a place for awards that recognise good ideas and the enthusiastic people in the regions who are making a difference.
Also I wanted to highlight good innovative practices because I believe that to stay ahead in a globalised economy Europe needs to constantly innovate. Regional policy is particularly suited to promoting an economic model for Europe based on innovation.

How successful has the first RegioStars been?
2008 is the first year of these awards and I am delighted that 71 regions responded with applications. The 71 regions came from 18 Member States. I think this was a very good response for the first year of such an award. I am particularly pleased with the efforts of all the nominees, but in particular I am pleased with the quality of all 26 finalists.

Was it easy to identify, assess and spotlight role model projects?
The first step was an open call for nominees to the relevant public authorities in the regions to identify for themselves a project in one of the categories. In this way I invited Europe’s regions and cities to select a project to represent them, which already proved to be a very effective quality filter. As I say, I am delighted that 71 regions responded with eligible applications. Assessing these projects was, indeed, quite a task. My services lent support to an expert jury, leading to the endorsed shortlist of 26 finalists for detailed evaluation.

What does it take to win an award?
The eligibility criteria require that the project is financially supported by an EU-backed programme and that the project is innovative in one of the chosen thematic categories. Apart from that, the prerequisite for a potential winner is a good idea and the engagement of the right partners in its implementation. A good project requires all of the elements that go into good project management and, of course, you need positive results.

Any wishes for RegioStars 2009?
My hope is that many more regions will realise that they too harbour potential award winners and they will take the time to nominate their ‘regional star’ for consideration. We have had applications from regions in the newer Member States and I can only hope that this trend will intensify. My wish is that all regions will see themselves as active and worthy participants in contributing to Europe’s growth and competitiveness.
**CATEGORy**

**Energy efficiency and renewable energies**

**Award winner**

**ENERGIVIE, Alsace, France** encourages demand for equipment related to renewable energies. It involves upgrading the skills of professionals in the solar power, wood-energy and construction sectors, as well as experiments to support low energy consumption buildings. According to the jury, “this project received an award because of its multi-dimensional quality. It covers in an integrated way a key subject area … The project has a coherent strategic approach and has been successful in translating this from the strategic level to the project level”.

**CATEGORy**

**Supporting clusters and business networks**

**Award winner**

**Øresund Science Region, the cross-border Øresund region, Sweden and Denmark**

This project is a cross-border partnership between Sweden and Denmark. Six innovative platforms bring together regional authorities, businesses and 14 universities from both sides of the border. The RegioStars Jury stated that “this project has had real impact and has overcome language, legislative and physical barriers by building interregional partnerships that had previously been non-existent. It is an excellent example of a bottom-up triple helix approach”.

**CATEGORy**

**Technology transfer from research institutes to small and medium enterprises (SMEs)**

**Award winner**

**EnviroINNOVATE, West Midlands, UK**

This network of universities helps the region’s SMEs to develop technology and address environment-related issues. These can range from monitoring and reducing emissions to developing biodegradable packaging. In the words of the RegioStars Jury, “EnviroINNOVATE is a good example of a professionally managed, innovative project that also demonstrates how financially low-key projects can have an important impact. Its aim was to help SMEs to exploit new markets and grow sales of environmental goods and services through direct interaction between SMEs and the region’s universities”.

**AWARDS WERE PRESENTED ON 26 FEBRUARY**

There were five winners from three categories.
The CICs network was established to help businesses harness the innovation and cutting-edge expertise in the region’s universities. It encourages industrial innovation, and research and development within the region. The RegioStars Jury saw this project as “an outstanding example of a sustainable project that has triggered collaboration and self-financing. The project was based on an analysis of the needs of regional industry and has been able to bring this to the CICs. In addition no subsidies were provided to companies or research groups – funding covered the incremental costs of providing a professional business/university interface and promoting their services”.

TWO OTHER PROJECTS received special mentions from the RegioStars 2008 Jury

**Special mention**

**Floating, Autonomous and Environmentally Friendly Desalination Unit, South Aegean, Greece**

This project developed a floating platform that uses energy provided from renewable sources and produces drinking water for the islands.

**Special mention**

**Innovation Assistant, Niederösterreich, Austria**

This project piloted a scheme to encourage SMEs to employ recent graduates to strengthen their technological and innovation competence.
RegioStars 2008 – FINALISTS

EnergiekompetenzPLUS – Energy Competence Centre Böbingen, Baden-Württemberg, Germany
The project has brought low-energy construction techniques to citizens and companies in the region and also established a cooperation network of companies.

Floating Autonomous Environmental Friendly and Efficient Desalination Unit, Greece
This floating platform in the Aegean Sea uses energy provided from renewable sources and produces drinking water for the islands.

Optimisation of the Socorridos hydroelectric power station, Autonomous Region of Madeira, Portugal
This project has transformed and optimised the Socorridos hydroelectric power station into a reversible system that can be used all year round, regardless of rainfall levels.

SmartLIFE, INTERREG III B North Sea – Cambridgeshire – United Kingdom (lead partner)
SmartLIFE demonstrates best-practice construction techniques in order to deliver housing that is affordable, energy efficient and environmentally sustainable.

ENERGIVIE, Alsace, France
This project encourages demand for renewable energies by improving the offer in the region and also by conducting experiments and studies.

The Advance Project, London, United Kingdom
The Advance project has provided SMEs with comprehensive guidance and support services on environmental technology implementation.

ArcelorMittal, Province Alpes Cotes d’Azur, France
The aim of the project was to make a contribution to the substantial reduction of atmospheric emissions from the ArcelorMittal facilities in Fos-sur-Mer.

Oresund Science Region – Cross-border triple helix collaboration, INTERREG – Oresund Sweden (lead partner) and Denmark
The project is organised around platforms that create linkages between 14 universities, regional authorities and companies around the cross-border region.

DIALOGUES (incorporating Nexusus), Western Scotland – United Kingdom
The aim of the project is to increase activity in investment in R&D within the biotechnology sector, linking the research base with SMEs and encouraging academics to work with SMEs.

Cluster Eco-construction, Province de Namur, Belgium
The cluster manages exchanges of experience, partnerships between companies, as well as putting together proposals, investments and promotion policy.

Regional Innovation System, Upper Austria
The programme aimed to develop further the region’s innovation support system by setting up a number of cross-sectoral networks between companies and public actors in existing clusters.

Mobient, Oulu Region, Finland
The objective of this project was to help the networking of content and media SMEs and provide small-scale financing for pilot productions and marketing.

OptIC Technium (Optronics Technology and Incubation Centre), Wales, United Kingdom
The project aims to grow existing businesses and attract inward investment to further strengthen the existing opto-electronics cluster in the region.

Region-Enterprises Forum on Logistics, INTERREG – Emilia-Romagna (lead partner) Italy
The Forum aims to enhance cooperation among enterprises, to rationalise and pool their demand for transport and logistics services, and to reduce transport costs, pollution and traffic congestion.

TECHNOFIT PRO 2005, Styria, Austria
By targeting a specific group, namely SMEs in outlying parts of Styria less experienced with R&D partnerships, the project aims to provide innovation support.

Embedded Internet System, Norra Norrland, Sweden
EIS relates to the production of smart products by adding computing capabilities and communication possibilities through internet to pre-existing products.

CeRDT, Province de Hainaut, Belgium
The Centre was launched to help SMEs in the region innovate and/or improve their products, services and methods.

Hysy Vision, Piedmont, Italy
The main goal of this project was to support the creation and strengthening of the hydrogen chain in the Piedmont region.

Competence Centre of Wing System Simulation and Wind Tunnel Verification – CCTS, Schleswig-Holstein, Germany
The focus of this project was process development for aerodynamic investigation and optimisation of wing systems (e.g. wind turbines or yacht sails) in natural wind currents.

Innovation Assistant, Niederösterreich, Austria
Niederösterreich piloted a scheme to encourage SMEs to employ recent graduates in order to strengthen their technological and innovation competence.

EnviroINNOVATE, West Midlands, United Kingdom
EnviroINNOVATE has enabled SMEs to link to specific expertise for developing innovative products in the growing field of Environmental Technologies.

Centre for Technology Transfer (CTT) in Torun, Kujawie-Pomeranie, Poland
The project addressed the issues of performance in the field of new technologies by SMEs, management and a qualified work force. It also delivered high-quality office, technical and industrial space to entrepreneurs.

Incubator-Technology Centre, Lower Silesia, Poland
The Centre enabled the increase of transfers of new technologies to existing and newly established business units and the promotion of regional pro-innovative entities.

EpiCentre (Electronics, Production and Innovation Technology Centre), INTERREG, Northern Ireland (lead partner) – United Kingdom
EpiCentre focuses on the development of a strong industrial research base through the integration of existing capabilities within regional third-level education providers.

Matching Technologies and Opportunities (MATEO), INTERREG – Catalonia – Spain (lead partner)
The main objective was to develop and execute collaborative subprojects that stimulate regional innovation through cooperation between entities from the participating regions.

Centres for Industrial Collaboration (CIC), Yorkshire and the Humber, United Kingdom
The CICs facilitate the transfer of skills and technology from universities to companies, encouraging greater levels of industrial innovation and research and development.

Detailed case studies of the 26 finalists can be found on the Regional Policy DG’s website: http://ec.europa.eu/inforegio/innovation/regiostars_en.htm
Short films on three of the 2008 RegioStars finalists are also accessible from this site.
network’s objectives were: exchange of knowledge, transfer of methodologies, creation of joint products, and a discussion platform. The network’s success, its transnational results and impact on learning were also analysed.

Mrs Michaela Pichlbauer gave the reasons for the participation of MünchenKompetent as a partner. She outlined the problems facing local SMEs along with the results of restructuring. The experiences for the partners, the city of Munich and the transnational partnership as seen from Munich were mainly positive, notwithstanding a relative lack of needs.

Mr Zdeněk Karásek described the problems for the Moravian-Silesian partner region. Thanks to a ‘competence model’ approach, under which the desiderata of firms were studied, training programmes for 14 competencies were created and widely disseminated among 20 partners inside and outside EURODECO. The Lifelong Learning working group of EURODECO played a key role in this.

Ms Teresa Zamora from Valles Occidental (Barcelona Region) presented the economic situation and the resources in her region, the background to the participation in an EQUAL project and also the intervention framework, process and expected outcomes.

The output within the context of EURODECO was also described, from both the organisational as well as the company standpoint.

Discussion
The discussion revealed further details of the network benefits. Several questions were raised and answered, e.g. how to keep these positive aspects available for future use, applying the results of relevant studies to other situations, the role of the European Commission versus the Member States in this context, how to qualify for and make use of networks in the new programming period, the role of research in terms of the skills needed in a constantly changing world, and the impact of networks on EU visibility.

Conclusions
During the workshop, the EURODECO network illustrated shared experiences, transfers of expertise and good practice, the development of collaborative approaches, and implementation of more effective solutions into mainstream policy. Thanks to the network, cooperation between rich and poor as well as old and new EU member countries was now possible.

Through the process of identifying commonalities, the partners identified the following as a stumbling block to employment growth: on the one hand, the lack of competencies adapted to the opportunities provided by the labour market; on the other hand, the inflexibility of existing forms of employment and organisational models, especially in SMEs, in relation to the available potential workforce. This problem produces a mismatch between supply and demand within the labour market, resulting in three main common development objectives:

- to seek a new culture of entrepreneurship aimed at the target groups most isolated from the labour market;
- to emphasise the development of competencies among existing human resources and provide these with the competencies demanded by regional, local or sectoral labour market opportunities;
- to create the necessary advisory mechanisms to support the adaptation process of businesses to the new characteristics of the potential or existing workforce.

EURODECO has produced four reports based on the working group activities and results with self-explanatory titles: key factors for organisational development; work integration through entrepreneurship; new ways of developing competencies/skills; transnational and European network development.
Outline

By using the example and the results of the CIVITAS initiative, this workshop considered the importance and added value of networking activities when defining urban transport strategies. The aim was to introduce cases where ideas stemming from networks have been translated into fully fledged policies at local, regional and national levels.

In his introductory remarks, Mr Karamitsos reminded participants of the adoption of the Green Paper ‘Towards a new culture for urban mobility’ in September 2007. This had demonstrated the European Union’s strong commitment to the issue of urban transport. This document has launched a consultation phase in which the stakeholders were invited to share their views until mid-March 2008; their contributions will be then used to define the Action Plan to be presented by the Commission in autumn 2008.

Discussion

In her presentation, Mrs Kopanezou first explained the need for a Green Paper by reiterating that all the EU Member States face the same problems and challenges in terms of urban mobility: Europeans long for free-flowing and greener towns and cities and also want smarter, accessible and safe urban transport systems. The EU can facilitate such changes, but without imposing solutions, through the exchange of knowledge and best practice, the setting of standards, better targeted financial support and – where necessary – a new legislative framework.

Mrs Kopanezou went on to stress the added value of exchanges organised through networks of EU cities. She quoted several examples, such as the national networks of CIVITAS cities (France, Romania, UK and Ireland). These networks make it possible to establish national partnerships between authorities and organisations and facilitate dialogue with governments to promote investment in sustainable transport. Another example is the Covenant of Mayors for Sustainable Energy Cities: the 100 member cities are pledged to go beyond the objectives of the European Union in terms of the reduction of CO₂ emissions. The Hydrogen Bus networks, the Eurocities network, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions as well as recently created networking activities thanks to the Regions for Economic Change initiative, all present opportunities to exchange know-how and so avoid the repetition of mistakes made in the past in certain cities.

Mr Rupprecht gave a comprehensive presentation of the CIVITAS initiative (budget, measures, programming periods, networks) as well as its results in different policy fields (clean vehicles, public passenger transport, access restrictions, pricing). Firstly, he highlighted the high overall success rate in implementing the measures. In particular, CIVITAS has been a major catalyst for the introduction of clean vehicles in participating cities. Furthermore, based on the overall results of CIVITAS I, it seems realistic to assume that – broadly speaking – 20% of urban journeys can be shifted from the car over to public transport and that 20% of bus fleets can be upgraded (using compressed natural gas instead of diesel). Mr Rupprecht finished by reminding participants of the conditions for the success of such an initiative (unstinting political backing during implementation of the measures, involvement of users and citizens at every phase) and of the barriers to be overcome, in particular the lack of stakeholder support at the planning phase, inadequate feasibility planning and low-key involvement of suppliers and industry.
Mr Jakič outlined the participation of Ljubljana in the third CIVITAS project and its impact on the definition of local policies. Alongside Ghent, Porto, Brno and Zagreb (all medium-sized cities with a large student population and an important cultural heritage), Ljubljana has worked on clean mobility solutions to improve public health and access for its inhabitants. In particular, the Slovenian capital city marked out a ‘CIVITAS corridor’ — in other words, a part of town in which to implement the different CIVITAS measures: tests of hybrid and biodiesel buses, the building of new railway stops, improved cycling and walking infrastructures, real-time information for bus drivers and passengers, launch of public awareness campaigns, development of demand-responsive services for targeted communities, and so forth. These measures, which aim to give the city back to the citizens, were also included in different strategic documents, notably the Ljubljana urban planning strategy offering a vision through until 2025.

Ms Oreviceanu explained the new challenges that most Romanian cities have to face: a rapid jump in car ownership, increased traffic congestion with severe environmental repercussions, traffic safety problems due to infrastructure deficiencies, and the development of urban freight transport. The participation of three Romanian cities in the CIVITAS initiative (Bucharest, Ploiesti, Suceava) will allow improvements at the local level (implementation of a bus monitoring system using GPS, upgrading of ticketing systems, new parking facilities, promotion of cycling). However, the CIVITAS experience will also provide know-how exploitable at national level: management of large-scale, complex projects; development of partnerships; application and promotion of European policies and initiatives; development of competences in reporting, monitoring and evaluation; and sharing best practice at EU level. The CIVITAS experience will also help Romania to define Urban Transport Blueprints, taking into account regional development and urban mobility issues. Lastly, the Action Plan on Urban Mobility to be published by the Commission in autumn 2008 will help the country define integrated strategies and encourage the different national ministries involved to coordinate their actions.

The final workshop presentation was not directly related to the CIVITAS initiative, with Mr Glotz-Richter introducing the MoCuBa project (Mobility Culture in the Baltic Sea Area), supported by the EU through the Baltic Sea INTERREG IIIB programme (2000-06). Many cities involved in this project are (or were) also part of the CIVITAS networks. The MoCuBa project shares a similar ethos. For two years, the eight participating cities and regions worked on the potentialities of electronic ticketing, urban light rail, car-sharing and cycling. The networking activities centred on urban mobility allowed technical exchanges and collective lobbying efforts.

Conclusions

The CIVITAS initiative has forged a link between the technical and the political aspects of urban mobility. The question now is how to transfer this shared knowledge to new cities in Europe. In certain EU member countries, CIVITAS has had to overcome a lack of coordination between the different ministries (urban transport actually spans transport itself, the environment and energy-related issues). The CIVITAS experience and forthcoming Action Plan (offering very concrete proposals) will help cities and EU member countries to define integrated strategies in urban mobility. These strategies will have to include commercial transport activities in addition to passenger transport.
Outline
The workshop aimed to present good practices for delivering sustainable energy, as derived from network activities, with the emphasis on mainstreaming policy ideas.

Discussion
Mr Roger Léron introduced the workshop by stating that the promotion of decentralised supply and demand for sustainable energy is essential to achieve the EU’s ambitious energy and climate change targets for 2020. Exploiting existing potential to the full calls for an active exchange of approaches and know-how between EU regions in order to raise partners’ activities up towards levels of excellence. He illustrated his point using the example of the Green Energy Clusters: based on an existing experience in the Oberösterreich region (AT), partners from Rhône-Alpes (FR), Skara (SE), Porsgrunn (NO), Drammen (NO) and the South West (UK) took stock of lessons from the original project and reworked it. The network grouped firms and other economic actors together within the same activity to reinforce their competitiveness and create a favourable business environment for SMEs that facilitates a critical mass for the development of renewable energies (REs), technologies and services.

Ms Kristina Dely further stressed the importance of decentralisation in terms of meeting EU energy challenges and the key role played by local authorities. She acknowledged that a new society model is about to see the light of day in which inclusion of the whole society and networking between different actors are essential for conceiving of and jointly implementing a more sustainable energy future. Two specific projects resulting from regional networking in the new Member States were cited: RUSE, designed to assist local authorities and regions to exert leverage on Cohesion policy in order to promote sustainable energies, resulting in a more overt presence for these energies in operational programmes and in deepening debate among national, regional and local authorities; and MODEL, designed to help 40 municipal pilot schemes plan, implement and evaluate municipal actions in the field of sustainable energy. She summed up factors in project success, e.g. defining a clear vision and sharing this among partners, adopting a flexible strategy on how to achieve the vision and setting up projects benefiting from a balanced political and practical level of partnership, providing the project with the required financial resources and placing skilled and dedicated people at its disposal.

Ms Águeda Areilza explained how her region was addressing tough energy challenges by creating the Foundation (as it had in 2005) to reinforce the promotion of sustainable energy and bring...
this policy closer to citizens. While some Foundation activities have been autonomously developed, for others cooperation with EU regions has been essential. For instance, the regional energy educational programme aimed at primary and secondary school students has reached out to more than 25,000 participants and is now being continued within the context of cooperation with other European regions and EU programmes. In another case, when the region embarked on a comprehensive approach to sustainable energies in buildings, it was confronted with the paradox of one regional government department granting aid towards the installation of residential biomass heating systems while another department was then suspending the implementation of these same heating systems on account of irregularities with existing regulations on thermal installations. This led to an updating of the municipal regulation and the seeking of assistance from other European regions. Based on the experience from the Oberösterreich region (AT) and in collaboration with other regions in Finland, Italy and the UK, Madrid has supported the installation of more than 50 pellet boilers in residential buildings with an investment of about €1 million.

Mr David Marlow recalled that regions, because of their size and proximity to citizens, are at the forefront in the drive towards a low-carbon economy, a key objective of his region. Regions working together are a prerequisite for success and for fully exploiting the growth potential of RES. He illustrated the experience of the East of England (UK) in collaborating with other regions to develop markets for sustainable residential buildings or for harnessing power from the seas. He backed the principles for successful partnerships: agreed principles; the ability to work together; clear-cut responsibilities; defining performance indicators that allow progress to be measured; willingness of partners to learn and improve; and investing competent people in the venture.

Ms Bruna Brembilla introduced the energy challenges faced by the province and the specific energy programme decided in 2006, after it had explored similar initiatives through FEDARENE. Ms Brembilla described the methodology followed by the region: identification of best practice through working groups and seminars with network members sharing the same goal; assessment of conditions for transferring experience; setting up working groups with local communities to design practical initiatives, i.e., building regulations, energy certification and financial mechanisms; working with administrative and business sectors, citizens groups and other stakeholders on an energy pact; and organising public gatherings to inform the public and discuss the initiatives for energy efficiency in the province. The tangible result of this process of external and internal partnerships is a provincial energy regulation on buildings that has been extended to regional level with the accreditation and registration of 500 regional energy certifiers; eight energy Info Points based on the Wallonia (BE) experience; and an investment scheme providing zero-rate bank loans based on the experience from Nord-Pas-de-Calais and Picardy (FR). Ms Brembilla concluded by calling for a further expansion of EU networks for the exchange of ideas and techniques. She reminded delegates that although these exchanges are not without cost or complexity, particularly in a multicultural system such as the EU, networking remains crucial for regional development.

Conclusions

The motivations at regional and local level for seeking advice have been similar: when confronted by a tough challenge, best practices in other EU regions should be investigated. Successful paths have followed for exchanges and adaptation to local needs has been spelt out.

Speakers drew attention to the fact that sharing experience and best practice in this field is a pioneering experience that requires further consolidation and expansion. A number of barriers to cooperation exist that need to be assessed and tackled. The opportunity to develop methodologies for comparative monitoring of the progress made by regions was also emphasised. Speakers underlined the key role played by the Commission in facilitating these exchanges and the need to continue promoting them.
There is no need to reinvent the wheel when it comes to preparing regional development policy and modernising regional economies for a globalised knowledge-based market. Good policy-making is something that can be acquired, as can methods for identifying and transferring good practices. Exchanges with programme managers from other regions to learn about their experiences, good and bad, in designing and implementing policies can save time and money and also provide opportunities for fruitful cooperation. This is one of the objectives of Cohesion policy and, in this context, the RegioStars Awards aim to identify good practices. This workshop in particular demonstrated good practices arising from policy-making and networking activities on the ground that could be identified and shared with others.

Discussion

In her presentation ‘Identifying good practice — the RegioStars experience’, Ms Katja Reppel asked what exactly good practice is and suggested that there is no definition of ‘good practice’ in absolute terms since there is no ‘one size fits all’ recipe for success. The European Commission has chosen a dynamic, context-based definition, namely to identify what has worked well, make it accessible and comparable and then facilitate its dissemination. Three main activities are used for dissemination of good practice: analysis, communication, and networking. Cohesion Policy makes its own valuable contribution here and the Regions For Economic Change is an ideal forum for this dissemination thanks to its ‘fast track’ option and the RegioStars Awards.

The main activities of the ‘Innovative Actions Network for the Information Society (IANIS+)’ were to develop an ‘e-Region Hub’ for providing policymakers with information for their regional information and knowledge-based society policies. Professor Gareth Hughes explained that the project’s aims were being met through several lines of action, including conferences, a summer school and policy seminars, regional good practice research and peer reviews (more difficult than originally expected), thematic work groups and dissemination. The means of sharing good practice and experience are all fine, but we also have to look at decent solutions, which is a real challenge. Networking is a skill in itself and in Europe we are still at an ad hoc stage. Another challenge involves classification: gathering good practice solutions is not enough since there is a need to codify and classify the information gathered. However, identifying and reporting good practice is an acquired skill that is neither
easy nor cheap. Prof. Hughes ended his presentation by calling for networking in the EU to be taken more seriously and pondered whether there should be a regional strategy on networking. In this regard, he pointed out that the Commission could take a lead in mainstreaming networking under the Structural Funds.

Mr Jens Erik Lund provided an insight into a transnational perspective on a policy framework in innovation and clusters. Compared to other economies, Europe is perceived as fragmented and, in this context, despite good practice being all well and good, Europe will never overcome the challenge of a fragmented economy without cooperation. The cluster support initiatives, or networks, lie mainly in the hands of the public sector, and innovation policy is in the hands of governments (local, national and European). Mr Lund also described the activities of the BSR InnoNet (Baltic Sea Region Innovation Network). This involved transnational participants and partners that included ministries and innovation agencies working together on equal terms and without a hierarchical approach. Its legacy is a strategic forum with transnational participants from the ministries and agencies that will continue to grow, with all the participating countries supporting the framework and the tools on facilitating and managing clusters and partners in the regions. Mr Lund said that the challenge facing innovation in Europe is that the supply side is providing most of the support, with very little coming from the demand side. In ending his presentation Mr Lund said that clusters are not the ‘castle’ but the ‘hub’ of innovation and stressed the importance of practitioners from all over Europe coming together to send the right message to policymakers.

The RegioStars 2008 award winner, ENERGIVIE, was presented by Mr Jean-Luc Sadorge. The project aimed to develop innovative regional strategies for sustainable development through the promotion of renewable energies in the Alsace region. In 2006 a cluster initiative devoted to renewable energies (Cluster Energivie) was established and the project continues to grow and develop. The keys to its success have been strong political support, regional facilitators working on the ground and using their knowledge and experience of renewable energies, and an ambitious communication campaign. The legacy of this project has been the achievement of its lofty goals and the mobilisation of all relevant regional actors to create an environment open to territorial initiatives. Ending his presentation, Mr Sadorge said that the most pertinent actions in addressing the challenge of global warming lie within the regions and their willingness to utilise local resources.

Mr Rino Rosini presented the RegioStars 2008 project ‘Region-Enterprises Forum on Logistics – Mutual Learning for Innovation in Transport and Logistics’. The project is the fruit of regional analysis of traffic congestion and its negative economic impact. The Forum’s innovative character stems from the ability to narrow the divide between economic development and environment protection. It has combined the development of innovative ICT tools and applications for logistics planning with non-technological organisational innovation and a matrix approach to networking between the relevant public and private actors. It has involved businesses along the supply chain, including logistics operators at regional level, regional and local authorities in charge of transport and road traffic planning, and partners from other European Union countries via exchanges of expertise.

Conclusions

In his summing-up, Mr Rudolf Niessler, Chairman and Director within the Regional Policy DG, referred to Prof. Hughes’ statement that networking is a skill that is still not fully developed in Europe. However, the efforts and activities of INTERREG and URBACT that are currently gaining momentum offer hope in this regard. He asked the audience to look at what could be done in future by building on current activities and learning from best practice in order to help develop support instruments. DG Regional Policy’s aim is to transfer best practice into the mainstream, with the ultimate goal of bringing together the main actors and funding bodies.
Fast Track Networks are a new main feature of the 2007-13 programming period. For the URBACT II programme, cities and regions will be asked to team up in order to create strong links between thematic networks and concrete actions as part of Operational Programmes. Consequently, both cities and regional Managing Authorities are acting as partners in these networks. To test this approach, two pilot ‘fast track’ networks have been developed under the URBACT I programme. Results are being used to fine-tune and further develop the ‘fast track’ approach. Within the workshop, participating cities and regions were asked to discuss their experiences with two networks: MILE (Managing migration and Integration at local Level), and URBAMECO (Creating Competitiveness & Social Cohesion in Deprived Urban Areas).

Discussion

The workshop was opened by Ms Natalija Kazlauskienė, who gave a short introduction to the workshop’s objectives and content. In her introductory words, she highlighted the importance of cities for EU Cohesion policy and the positive role of networking for policy development.

As opening speaker, Mr Władysław Piskorz presented the Commission’s perspective on the urban dimension of EU Cohesion policy and new networking opportunities for cities. In Europe’s regional development, cities and urban areas have a major role to play – both for boosting competitiveness and innovation and for fostering social and economic cohesion. In the new programming period (2007–13), a large number of Operational Programmes has a specific urban priority axis, and ‘mainstreamed’ urban actions clearly contribute to the foremost challenges facing European policy. In addition, the networking programme for cities (URBACT II 2007–13) will help to generate, develop and disseminate knowledge on urban development across Europe. Through the Regions for Economic Change initiative, the programme will also create strong links between the thematic networks and actions to be financed within mainstream Operational Programmes. Mr Piskorz stressed the Commission’s satisfaction with the opening results from these two networks, and concluded by underlining the importance of the connection between networking and in situ implementation.

To illustrate the Lead Partner’s perspective, Ms Roberta Capuis presented the network and its initial results. The network, consisting of 10 cities and 10 Managing Authorities, deals with the issue of local-level migration and integration. As Ms Capuis reported,
partners view the links between different levels (local, regional and European), the creation of partnerships between key actors in the field of migration, and the focus on linking exchange activities with implementation, as main assets. She also highlighted the fact that newly established partnerships between cities and their regions would provide both partners with a positive stimulus for the future cooperation.

Mr Rémy Nouveau completed the picture by presenting the initial results from the URBAMECO Pilot Fast Track Network. Lyon’s motivation in initiating the network as Lead Partner stemmed from the metropolitan area’s interest in improving multi-level governance. The URBAMECO network, again consisting of cities and their managing authorities, focuses on creating activities to foster competitiveness and social cohesion in disadvantaged urban areas. Mr Nouveau underlined the conviction among partners that networks would help improve cooperation between different levels to create Local Action Plans (including training for practitioners and expertise from others) and also activate different funding resources. As representatives from the regional and national level confirmed, the network also has the very tangible benefit of delivering best practice operations for the entire Rhône-Alpes region.

After the presentations from two cities, Ms Tiziana Dell’Olmo delivered a ‘regional perspective’ on one of the networks. She pointed out that – after overcoming initial difficulties in establishing ‘new’ partnerships – the MILE network created a new ‘awareness’ for the importance of dialogue between regional and local actors. Given the existing reference to Regions for Economic Change in the Operational Programme, the Piedmont region wanted to valorise the role of exchanges of experience for implementation. In her conclusions, Ms Dell’Olmo underlined the regional government’s wish to continue its efforts in this direction, including after and beyond the framework of the MILE network.

The final speaker, Ms Karolina Włodarska, added a city partner’s take on the URBAMECO Pilot Fast Track Network. As a city from a new EU member country, the city of Łódź had a special interest in learning from highly experienced network partners – particularly to improve the quality of ERDF investment. As Ms Włodarska outlined in her presentation, the city is planning to transfer the network’s working method for creating integrated Local Action Plans to several other disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In her conclusions, she also underlined the importance of the Commission’s involvement and of close cooperation with the Managing Authority.

In the ensuing debate, several speakers highlighted the challenge of involving the right people in the networks and getting the relevant managing authorities on board. Other points of debate included the question of using different national and European funds for operations on the ground and the impact of national policies on regional or local projects. Speakers agreed that it would be necessary to keep encouraging actors to develop increased and deeper cooperation. Only well integrated and well coordinated projects will be able to deliver results with a positive long-term bearing on urban and regional development.

The Chair, Ms Natalija Kazlauskienė, ended the workshop by thanking the speakers and rapporteur for their work. She concluded by expressing her confidence that a good number of URBACT II networks will be labelled as ‘fast track’ in the near future.

Conclusions

The workshop underlined the need for close co-operation between local, regional and national authorities to achieve sustainable urban development. The ‘fast track’ approach has been identified as a very positive impetus for creating new links – both institutionally and thematically. These links are expected to deliver better results in terms of implementation through new ideas from networks. At the same time, new connections will enhance network efforts by adding very real implementation challenges.

1 The ‘Two Pilot Fast Track Networks’ brochure provides detailed information on the objectives, implementation process and results of the networks. Published at www.urbact.eu
Supporting the Local and Regional Authorities in their innovation efforts is definitely a good investment of public resources, and the Regions for Economic Change initiative is a good example of what the European institutions can do. Indeed, Member States have recognised that growth and jobs can only be delivered through the successful involvement of regional actors.
Supporting the Local and Regional Authorities in their innovation efforts is definitely a good investment of public resources, and the Regions for Economic Change initiative is a good example of what the European institutions can do.

You can do a lot […] at the European level, but you can do so many more things at regional level: you can do so much better, and so much faster, regionally.

Indeed, Member States have recognised that growth and jobs can only be delivered through the successful involvement of regional actors.

There is one more thing which I would like to stress. It is the importance of your enthusiasm, your creativity, the wealth of ideas you have shown […] during the last two days. Those who complain about a Europe that is ageing, has no solutions and is only trying to maintain the status quo, should come here and listen to you.
Without an active Cohesion policy, the Lisbon Strategy could not work properly: [...] not only have we observed the so-called 'Lisbonisation' of Cohesion policy, but also the necessity for other policies and for the Lisbon Strategy to use the experience of Cohesion policy to achieve its goals.

It is quite clear that networking has a key role to play in the growth of European regions and cities and for the achievement of the Lisbon objectives. All of us have much to give to, and to gain from, working together in the cause of development: good policy-making can be learnt, and methods for identifying good ideas and transferring them can also be acquired.

Regional cooperation in the energy field is [...] vital. More than ever I am convinced that the slogan 'think globally and act locally' is appropriate for facing the current energy challenges. [...] There is no doubt whatsoever that regions are essential for realising the potential of sustainable energy.

Regions are important: you know [that] Europe is not homogeneous, consists of many different spatial entities that fuel and support the European engine [...] Regions are different: no region is like any other [...] and this is important for policy, because there is no universal strategy for regional development.
Conference Proceedings

Regions for economic change — Sharing excellence

The aim of ‘Regions for Economic Change’ is to address the core issues facing Europe by building a stronger link between the exchange of good practices in EU networking programmes (INTERREG IV C and URBACT II) and the main body of EU Cohesion funding in national and regional operational programmes. On 25–26 February 2008, invited by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions, over 500 participants from regions throughout Europe have gathered in Brussels to discuss how European regional policy can concretely help regions and cities to learn from one another and translate network outputs into action through mainstream programmes.

The ‘Sharing Excellence’ conference proceedings outline the reflections of all who shared their experiences in devising effective responses to the challenges with which Europe is confronted. A special section is dedicated to the RegioStars Awards finalists and winners, whose innovative projects were rewarded for the first time this year in an awards ceremony during the conference.

A DVD with all the presentations and films displayed during the event is also included.

Inferegio

Consult the Inferegio website for an overview of EU European Regional Policy:

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