

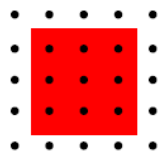
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EU-Latin America Cooperation on Regional Innovation Systems in the Framework of Regional Policy

Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
Communication, information, relations with third countries

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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1 Introduction

The EU-Latin America project on regional innovation systems was implemented in the framework of the European Parliament's support for putting EU regional policy into a stronger international context. The project aimed at supporting the effort of the European Union and the Latin America countries to reinforce their strategic partnership¹.

During the project, Ismeri Europa supplied technical assistance, training and expert advice with the support of Emilia&Romagna and Baden Württemberg, related to specific development needs that emerged in Cordoba (Argentina) and Santa Catarina (Brazil). These Province and State authorities were closely involved in the project and provided technical and political support during its development.

The project addressed the field of institutional cooperation with the aim of: strengthening regional innovation strategy design, implementation and management; reinforcing support services for the inclusion of the SMEs and micro enterprises into the regional innovation system, with a specific focus on cluster support policies.

In the participating regions of Cordoba and St. Catarina an explicit demand for support in these fields emerged during the various preparatory initiatives and official meetings. For this reason the project focus has been concrete and operational and involved a whole range of stakeholders in both EU and LA which operate in these fields, such as firms, public and private agencies, Universities and innovation centres. A new approach of cooperation, based on reciprocity of interest to reinforce business and trade links has been carried out. This approach implied a large and complete and strongly motivated participation of a group of leading regional officials and of firms, in each activity of the project.

The main objective of the project is to diffuse the EU regional policy experience and best practice and exchange experiences between regional institutions on regional innovation strategy by supporting the implementation of new instruments and practices, focusing on clusters of SME and by establishing trans-continental firms and business links to enhance transfer of technology and trade.

This objective was pursued by implementing a mix of connected activities aimed at supporting the selected officials and agencies responsible for innovation policy in Cordoba and St. Catarina:

- Workshops and training
- Study visits
- Tutoring
- Concluding international workshop

¹ E.g. Madrid Action Plan 2010-2012 (Council of the European Union, EU-LAC Summit "Towards a new stage in the bi-regional partnership: innovation and technology for sustainable development and social inclusion", Madrid, 18.5.2010); EU-LAC Knowledge Area and EU-LAC Joint Initiative for Research and Innovation.

2 Workshop and training

The objective of this activity was to discuss the project objectives and contents with the regional stakeholders and provide training sessions for 10-20 officials and experts on the themes that have been agreed on regional Innovation strategy and SME service provision. The first workshop was also an opportunity to explain the local state of affairs on the subject and the on-going projects; to fix the specific objectives, a road map and a common agenda with local authorities, specifying outputs and results and getting a commitment on them from all the participants. A very appreciated innovation was that participants from the other south American region as well as from the 2 EU regions were present at all meetings. Each subject included a participative section to discuss experiences in all regions and exercises or demonstrations were carried out. The front training method throughout all the 6 weekly sessions, was very much reduced in favour of a more interactive and practice-oriented method.

The training was divided into 3 weekly modules (Regional Innovation Strategy design and management, SMEs services, Biotech applied to agro-food production) and was carried out by 4/6 highly qualified technicians from the EU regions and from ISMERI EUROPA for the strategy module.

The local authority selected the participants among its officials, local experts and technicians from local agencies and universities and firms etc. The selection was designed to choose those participants which will best apply the training contents into their institution. Each module had different participants given the specific focus of the subject. In the modules focusing on SMEs services, representatives of firms have been involved.

2.1 Training session on regional innovation strategy design and management

The participants in this module are the local functionaries and experts from local agencies and research centres which are at different levels involved in the decision making and the management of the strategy and of the instruments that each region has designed to carry out the strategy. This session lasted 5 days and was carried out with an operational approach, using training methods stimulating the participation, discussions and exchange of experiences from both UE and LA. It was carried out as follows:

- Strategy setting (methods and principles, basic information)
- Support activities (foresight, peer reviews, etc.)
- Partnership (University, firms, other stakeholders)
- Monitoring and evaluation

2.2 Training session on SMEs services

Subjects: agro-food, meat and dairy products. The training was carried out by a technician from a specialized agency from Emilia-Romagna. The trainees were mostly micro and small firms in the sector of 2 local clusters in Cordoba and Chapecò, officials and agents dealing with SMEs services in this particular sector. Their professional profile is such that they have a sufficient background knowledge of the sector from the productive or marketing side. The methods were designed to give practical and operational know-how in order to put in practice the teaching content; partly this was done through an

audit of a sample of firms followed by a diagnosis and an agenda. A significant portion of each day was devoted to discussions.

2.3 Training on biotech applied to agro-food productions

The other session of training focused on another sector (Biotech and its application to agro-food). The structure of this week was similar in its objectives and methods to the previous session and involved a cluster of firms selected by the host regions, with particular needs which were tackled by the training content and by transferring the EU experience. The training was carried out by an expert from the public agency of Baden Württemberg.

A further significant output of this training modules focusing on concrete problems of specific firms, paved the way for further cooperation between the regions and between the institutions and agencies. The potential for cooperation as well as the transferred know-how was consolidated during the study visit.

2.4 Study visit

The study visit and “traineeship” in Europe took place in October 2012. It lasted approximately 2 weeks and involved the officials responsible for project activities in Cordoba and Santa Catarina. These were selected in accordance with the results emerging from the previous project activities. The study visits helped to consolidate their know-how with a complementary experience on methods and tools that are applied in the EU regions, which can be transferred or adopted. Meetings with the EU regional officials responsible for governance, clusters and micro/SME policies were organised and tailor made to the needs and requests of the beneficiaries. They focused on the operational features of their instruments and techniques and how to apply them to a different social and economic context. Firms and research centres dealing with these issues were visited (Public agencies and Policy makers in the regions; agro-food and biotech firms and agencies).

The study visits supported the establishment of links between the officials and EU agencies and firms able to provide know-how for the technological development of their regions.

A further outcome of the study visit consisted in the “cross-fertilization” effect which benefits both Latin American regions: officials from Santa Catarina worked together with the staff of Cordoba bringing new perspectives to the discussions and contributing to collective learning and future cooperation.

2.5 Tutoring activities

The tutoring activities aimed at consolidating the results of the training into outputs and concrete initiatives that were implemented in the LA regions that were of interest to the delegation.

The tutoring was carried out as a technical assistance aiming at coaching and assisting FAPESC² and MinCyT³ in:

- Designing and setting up a regional strategy planning based on coordination and partnership between the main stakeholders of the innovation system.

² Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa e Inovação do Estado de Santa Catarina (BR).

³ Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación Productiva (AR).

- Supporting the institution in LA to organise the clusters of SMEs operating in the agro-food (dairy and pork meat) and biotechnology sectors in Cordoba and St. Catarina.

2.6 International Workshop on Regional Innovation Systems

An international workshop, which was the final phase of the project, organized by Ismeri Europa and the Fapesc and local University was held in Chapecò from the 5th to the 8th of March. Chapecò is the province specialized in agro-food in S.ta Caterina. More than 100 participants from the province, from Argentina, Colombia and the Brazilian Central government, the EU delegation, and 40 firms were actively involved.

The international workshop pursued 2 distinct objectives in line with the project action plan and the operational approach given to the activities. On the one hand it revised the main achievements of the work carried out and drew a final balance of the project activities with the main beneficiaries and with a wide local and international audience and on the other hand it considered how the adopted method of work could be further developed in the years to come in view of the successful results that had emerged during the whole period. The EU delegation was invited to give its contribution to enhance the EU-LA exchange in the area of innovation. The firms representatives took the opportunity to establish business links and contacts on technology transfer and trade.

3 Main lessons learned and conclusions

A number of lessons emerged from the activities of the project. They concern on one hand the inspiring principles of the regional innovation strategy that can be used as guidelines in the process on the other hand the interest of the regions in both sides EU and L.A. to develop new and more operational and business oriented cooperation, on innovation and transfer of technology conducive to more intense trade and inter-firm links.

- In most regions in EU and in L.A., with few exceptions, the innovation actors do not work within a coordinated framework; they tend to work within their own individual strategy and set of rules and practices. Coordination at a local territorial level is not systematic and often not recognized as a value; especially in some centralistic countries like Argentina, and to some extent in St. Catarina where several private agents operate in the innovation area.
- The project has defined methods to set up a realistic coordination framework and suggested that coordination in an initial phase should be limited to those actors and areas in which there is a desire to work together and to participate in the elaboration of a strategy and of an agenda. In other words, the strategy initially should be limited in its scope and ambitions, however, it needs to be shared among actors and carried out systematically and coherently.
- A cooperation open to 2 Latin American regions from 2 countries and 2 EU regions was an innovative element which promoted richer and more diversified interregional discussions and exchange of best practice; permanent links including business were established and continue after the project.
- The strategy needs to be focused on the local potential (firms, know how, etc.) and therefore the process of strategy definition and partnership needs to define priorities and make selective choices on where to intervene and what to do. Setting too wide strategies and programs which cannot be fulfilled due to the lack of actors, lack of common aims and lack of resources should be avoided.
- A regional strategy needs to be supported by scenarios and insights on the future trends and needs to be monitored carefully and evaluated in an independent way. In addition, the strategy need not be mainly carried out by public institutions, which have to provide a framework and the instruments to the private and non-profit sectors, to make them the main actors.
- The management of the regional strategy requires accurate monitoring and independent evaluation in order to verify the outputs and results. A careful evaluation is a necessary instrument for the continuation of the policies and the choice of instruments.
- The regional strategy needs to attract and involve all the main actors of the region and provide them with common objectives and aims. These objectives must be based on a common and long term vision of the future society and on a social and political scenario in which the majority of citizens see their expectations recognized.
- A regional strategy needs to focus on SMEs or at least on some crucial sectors of SMEs which in most regions are the core of the productive fabric. Including SMEs in the innovation process is a necessary condition for the success and upgrading of the regional economy.
- The method experimented during the project focused on cluster policy innovation. Services can be provided through the organization of value chain clusters in sectors of SMEs and micro enterprises. The project activities were successful and 2 clusters in

agro-food in Cordoba and S.ta Catarina were established after the training week and the study visit in the EU.

- Regional strategies should not be autarchic and need to be open to other regions in different parts of the world; the internationalization of strategies and of the actors reinforce their activities and allow the regions to enter in international networks of actors and to benefit from wider competences and knowledge.
- The example of Medellin in Colombia has shown how innovation policies linked to infrastructures provision, education and other supportive policies on a social ground can rapidly and effectively change the dynamic of development of a once very problematic city as Medellin.
- A full involvement of the firms was crucial to the transfer of innovation. The project has been successful in enhancing international cooperation on concrete issues and in establishing links between firms operating in different countries and continents.