

REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGIES IN THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

February 1997

PRELUDE

European Community's ambitious program "INNOVATION" aims at helping the regions to improve their support infrastructures, as well as their complementary policies for innovation and those for technology transfer to small and medium sized enterprises - SMEs. To diffuse good practices and encourage interregional cooperation in innovation, promotion is a central part of the objective of "INNOVATION". The challenge for the European Commission (the governing body of the European Community) is to contribute to the development of a shared vision of the role of innovation in regional development, without interfering with the specific processes of strategy building in each of the regions.

"INNOVATION", covers a set of interrelated projects; for instance: Regional Innovation Strategy - RIS, Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Infrastructures and Strategies - RITTS, Regional Technology Transfer Projects - RTT. Twenty eight European regions have been working on RIS and RITTS, since they were launched in 1994. Another forty regions have successfully applied for similar initiatives; so around one region in four across the European Community is now carrying out this sort of activity.

This report provides a brief outlook to the programs on regional innovation strategies in the European Community. Considering the scope and domain, it appears the set of projects concentrating on enhancing local innovation capabilities provides the most comprehensive structure for the development of regional systems of innovation in Europe, and probably in the world.

FROM 'WHITE PAPER ON GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT' TO 'GREEN PAPER ON INNOVATION'

In the view of the proposals made in the 'White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment' of 1993, the European Commission decided to launch a pilot action called Regional Technology Plan - RTP. The success of this project was instrumental in the development of the European Commission's Green Paper on Innovation, first published in December 1995 and then revised in the early 1996.

The Green Paper on Innovation, transcending the classical vision of innovation, intends to develop a new “view to arriving at a genuine European strategy for the promotion of innovation. The capacity for innovation involves various policies: industrial policy, research and technology development -RTD policy, education and training policy, tax policy, competition policy, regional policy, and policy on support for small and medium sized enterprises - SMEs, environment policy, etc.” In this context, the Green Paper establishes a set of routes for action, as follows, which are then broken into a series of concrete proposals. Noticeably, action number 12 represents an effort to reinforcing the regional dimension of innovation.

Route of action 1	To develop technology monitoring and foresight
Route of action 2	to better direct research efforts towards innovation
Route of action 3	To develop initial and further training
Route of action 4	To further the mobility of students and researchers
Route of action 5	To promote recognition of the benefits of innovation
Route of action 6	To improve the financing of innovation
Route of action 7	To set up a fiscal regime beneficial to innovation
Route of action 8	To promote intellectual and industrial property
Route of action 9	To simplify administrative procedures
Route of action 10	To develop a favorable legal and regulatory framework
Route of action 11	To develop ‘economic intelligence’ actions
Route of action 12	To encourage innovation in enterprises, especially SMEs, and strengthen the regional dimensions of innovation
Route of action 13	To update public action for innovation

REGIONAL INNOVATION STRATEGY - RIS

In 1994 the European Commission introduced the concept of Regional Technology Plan - RTP (later renamed Regional Innovation Strategy - RIS) in order to experiment with methods for developing regional policies in the area of innovation. The RTP-RIS pilot initiative has been coordinated jointly by two departments: DG XVI (Regional and Cohesion Policy) and DG XIII (Technology Policy). The European Commission realizes that it is not only the presence and accessibility of technological know-how that is important, but also the business climate and the level of cooperation between the socioeconomic actors in the region.

The European Commission has formulated the following two broad objectives for the RIS:

- Regions should develop their regional innovation strategy.
- A framework should be created for the benefit of both the regions and the European Community to optimize the effectiveness of the regional policy decisions.

RIS, first and foremost, aims at developing a strategy for supporting innovation at the regional level. In the words of the Commission, the final aim of a RIS is to help regions to cooperate and innovate locally and to compete globally. Charting the areas of economic and technological development that are most important to a region, RIS could become a significant instrument for further support. RIS is a strategy aimed at supporting regional cooperation in technology development and innovation. In this

context, the emphasis is on the agents located in the region.

The 'Regional Technology Plan Guide Book' classifies the expected RIS operational results as following:

1. Clear strategic framework for regional innovation
2. Creation of networks and promotion of inter- and intra-regional cooperation
3. Identification and preparation of a stock of innovation projects in firms
4. Strengthening of regional research and technology development and innovation centers
5. Advice and orientation in the design of new public / private programs for the promotion of innovation.

The Guide Book organizes the main characteristics of the RIS approach, as follows:

- **Regional:** Each project must relate to a specific geographical area, but it takes full account in its definition of the national and international context in which it is operating.
- **Bottom-up:** Both the private sector and representatives of the regional and national scientific and technological community take an active role. The idea is to provide for a stronger regional partnership through this process.
- **Strategic and Coordinated:** Based on the environment and long term criteria and placing its policy of promoting research and technology development and innovation within the context of industrial and regional policy.
- **Integrated:** Each project should try to link efforts from the public sector (local, regional, national and European) and the private sector towards the common goal of increasing regional productivity and competitiveness.
- **Multidisciplinary:** Each project should take the technological, economic and institutional criteria fully into account.
- **International:** Each project should keep an international perspective in terms of the analysis of global economic trends as well as the need to cooperate nationally and internationally to be more effective in the fields of research and technology development and innovation.

RIS PROCEDURE

The European Commission first initiated a set of proposals for drafting a Regional Innovation Strategy which would involve charting the economic and technological development of a region. The Commission finances up to 50% of the eligible costs for the elaboration of RIS with a ceiling of ECU 250,000 (about CDN \$ 400,000) per region. This covers financial support towards the coordination of the exercise (e.g. studies, visits, provision of a secretariat, coordination of necessary research, information and dissemination activities, etc.) and the cost of bringing in external expertise. Initially each RIS project was planned to last for about 18 months.

RIS CASES

The first phase of RIS covers four pilot regions: Limburg (Netherlands), Lorraine (France), Wales (UK) and Saxony (Germany). Later four more regions also launched RIS pilot projects: Norte (Portugal), Macedonia (Greece), Abruzzo (Italy) and Castilla-y-Leone (Spain). The list of all RIS

projects, as well as the contact addresses, is appended at the end of this report. This section continues to provide information about three RIS projects of the first phase:

RIS Limburg (NL): The innovation strategy of the province of Limburg (Netherlands) intends to “reinforce the level of knowledge within industrial companies in Limburg, especially SMEs, and improve their access to knowledge and educational infrastructure.”

RIS Wales (UK): The objective of the RIS Wales has been defined as “to achieve a consensus amongst public and private bodies on the overall objectives and actions required to upgrade the technological base, skills content, innovative capacity, value-added performance and RIS expenditure of the Wales economy.”

RIS Lorraine (F): The objectives are stated as follows: “To give more coherence to the use of all resources, from the European Community, national and regional level, devoted to innovation, in order to foster innovation in the strategy of existing SMEs, and develop industrial tissue with new, high value-added activities”. The development of such policies should “be based on better knowledge of the real needs of the productive sector and the strengths and weaknesses of the region with respect to innovation.”

MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE ABOVE RIS CASES

The current exercises held in the pilot RIS projects deliver a number of orientations and ‘good practices’ for regional innovation policies:

- Innovation is not to be considered as an isolated policy area for the regions. Rather, innovation is a pervasive concept, impinging on every traditional field of policy intervention and in every sector of activity. There is a move away from ‘technology-only’ visions towards more user-oriented, demand-led approaches. SMEs are specifically targeted for their role in wealth and employment creation in the European Community economies.
- Holistic visions and horizontal definitions of the concept of innovation are pertinent. Accordingly, integrative strategies are necessary if innovative behavior is to be stimulated in the regions of the European Community.
- Learning processes and the development of the absorptive capacities of the economic agents, notably SMEs, with regard to innovation, should be one of the main focuses of regional policies. In a knowledge-intensive economy, the provision of information is not the main problem; rather, the ability of agents to transform this information into real knowledge is the key.
- The importance of developing strategic capacities for building coherent innovation policies cannot be over-stressed: measures and schemes for fostering innovation will bear full fruit, if and only if, they are embedded in coherent, global frameworks with clear priorities and synergy between all resources devoted to this goal. In addition, strategic planning needs to be based on a thorough analysis of the region’s comparative advantages and weaknesses. Regional priorities should be defined very clearly; otherwise there is a risk that actions and projects could be implemented in a ‘technology push’ fashion, rather than as a response to identified, expressed or

latent users' needs.

- To develop strategies, it is necessary to benefit from broad political support and general consensus from the regional actors. Without such political support, there is a real danger of developing vague strategies, based on brilliant but unrealistic ideas, and lacking access to the resources needed for the support of the actions.
- Strategy building is a learning process in itself, to be conceived in an evolutionary fashion, with recursive loops and feedbacks, and to take advantage of exchanges of experiences from elsewhere only if regional priorities are clearly defined.
- RIS experiences show that there is a dialectical role for the European Community in the area of regional innovation policy: on one hand, it is clear that a stimulus from above may be very helpful to introduce new policy building in the regions. But, on the other hand, there is a fundamental need to respect the diversity of the regions, to let their endogenous dynamics play, in a word to act in a subsidiary role.

REGIONAL INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER INFRASTRUCTURES AND STRATEGIES - RITTS

The RIS projects are complemented by the Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Infrastructures and Strategies - RITTS. Covering all regions in the European Community, RITTS supports local and regional governments and/or development organizations in the analysis and development of the innovation and technology transfer infrastructure of the region concerned. RITTS aims at supporting the organization in charge of regional development to assess, enhance and optimize the regional innovation capabilities, with the objective to meet the needs of regional SMEs.

RIS and RITTS are jointly managed by the services of DG XVI and DG XIII which are responsible for ensuring synergy and cooperation between the two actions (including project selection, management and follow-up, methodological support, exchange of experience and the dissemination of best practice). Regions having undertaken a RITTS exercise with support from DG XVI are eligible for support for a RIS, albeit at a reduced level (to take into account the work already supported).

The RIS and RITTS have many commonalities in terms of objectives, methodology and philosophy; as both of them are:

- Demand led (especially SMEs)
- Action-oriented
- Based on building regional consensus and agreement
- Reference to the same core specifications
- Access to international experience

On the other hand, there are differences between RIS and RITTS:

- RITTS intends to support the bodies in charge of regional development to assess, enhance and optimize the regional innovation and technology transfer strategies and infrastructures, together with the key regional actors, with the objective to better meet the needs of regional SMEs.

- RIS aims at strengthening the partnership between the key actors in a region, in order to finalize an innovation strategy within the framework of the regional economic development policy.
- RIS is managed by DG XVI and DG XIII, whereas RITTS is managed only by DG XIII.
- RITTS scheme concerns the whole of the EEA, while RIS is limited to regions with more than 50% of the population in European Regional Development Fund eligible areas.

“INNOVATION”, on the other hand, summarizes the following comparison between RIS and RITTS:

RITTS: Regional Innovation and Technology Transfer Strategies	RIS: Regional Innovation Strategies
Operations may involve the whole of the European Community	Confined to the regions where a significant shares of the population is in an ERDF-aided area
The project leader is not necessarily a regional authority.	The project leader at policy level is the authority responsible for economic development in the region. Implementation may be in the hands of a designated regional body reporting to a steering committee.
Projects are designed to assist the bodies in charge of regional development to evaluate, develop and optimize regional infrastructure and the policies and strategies for supporting innovation and technology transfer	The projects are designed to create partnership among the key actors in a region with a view to defining an innovation strategy for the region in the context of regional development policy
Work program focusing on regional infrastructure and policies with respect to supporting innovation and technology transfer; for instance including financial and organizational aspects.	Work program includes all aspects of regional policy on innovation and research and technology development - RTD (including training) and, where relevant, feasibility studies for proposed innovation strategies.
Use of a team of (approved) consultants to carry out all the work, to include one consultant from another country of the European Community (for at least 1/3 of the work)	Use of an approved process consultants for a limited part of the work program only. Steering committee decides on the organization of studies and technical assistance.
Projects are “self-sustaining”. They are carried out for the intrinsic benefits to the region.	Projects should help the region to use the Structural Fund money linked to innovation schemes.
The European Community support: Maximum ECU 250,000 for the assisted regions (ECU 175,000 for other regions).	The European Community support: Maximum ECU 250,000.

There exists a proliferation of objectives and ways of operating in the specific regions, in line with the

aims and goals of the European Commission. Synergies and cooperation between the two actions are foreseen, including project selection, management and follow up, methodological support, exchange of experience and diffusion of best practices. On the whole, it appears the similarities between RIS and RITTS are much stronger than their differences.

RITTS has already been developed in the following regions: Flanders (Belgium), Thessaly (Greece), Aquitaine (France) Nord-Pas-de-Calais (France) as well as in Iceland. The list of all RITTS projects and their contact addresses are appended at the end of this report.

RITTS Cases

London Technopole Initiative -LTI, is concerned with issues related to the development of a regional consensus for effective technology transfer and the promotion of innovation in the Lea Valley area of North London. The area forms a 26 km corridor down the north east of London, UK.

LTI is being coordinated by the University of North London (Economic Development Unit) and a team of consultants: ‘Angle Technology’ and ‘Mary Rogers’ (UK), as well as ‘Innovation and Networks’ (Italy)

The initial stimulus of the LTI is the development of a networking system for innovation and technology transfer for local economic regeneration in London. The program being designed to link into other regional initiatives, including the development of new science parks and networks.

LTI consists of three stages, Stage One covers definition and initial survey. Stage Two concerns with the development of an action plan based on the findings of the Stage One. Stage Three will covers the implementation of Stage Two (the action plan) alongside a mechanism for monitoring the effectiveness of pilot programs emerging from the action plan.

Regarding technology and innovation as the terms that denote the improvements in the products, production processes, material and intermediate inputs and management and organizational systems, LTI has a Schumpeterian view towards innovation.

The survey of 116 SMEs is a key component of the Stages One of LTI. The questionnaire and interviews were designed to elicit the innovation and technology process within the regional SMEs. The study seeks to understand the innovation process within SMEs, and to understand how effective current provision of services are within the context of current innovation and technology base of regional firms.

The surveyed firms identified ‘downstream’ innovation process issues, such as marketing, finance and information, as major impediments to the development of their innovative and competitive capacity.

Stage One has referred to some deficiencies and opportunities for a regional consensus for technology transfer and innovation strategies to generate local competitive advantage for SMEs in the area. The development of a consensus plan will take place in Stage Two

REGIONAL TECHNOLOGY TRANSFER PROJECTS - RTTs

Regional Technology Transfer Projects (RTTs), another group of activities, aims to stimulate the dissemination of technology and validate the results of research and development amongst enterprises most likely to have an impact on key economic sectors in less-developed regions.

This is to be achieved through the identification and selection of a number of multi-regional projects having a clear innovative and demonstrative effect, particularly in regions which have previously elaborated a regional innovative strategy through projects such as RIS or RITTS.

RTTs are divided into definition and implementation phases. The Commission provides financial support covering up to 75% of the cost of the definition phase, to a ceiling of ECU 75,000 (about CDN \$ 120,000). For the implementation phase, the Commission covers up to 50% of the eligible costs of the RTT project. The financial contribution is normally between ECU 1 and 3 million (about CDN \$ 1.6 to 4.8 million).

EUROPEAN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT FUND (ERDF)

Another group of the Commission's activities promotes regional networking for the exchange of know-how and the development and dissemination of activities conducted under RIS or RTT. These actions are carried out by the regions working together with assistance from a body of experts made available to them by the European Commission. This program has a budget of ECU 15 million for a period of 60 months.

The above programs are covered by ERDF which provides support for innovative actions in regional development through a number of pilot schemes. These innovations measures aim to develop new ways of introducing innovation and technology transfer in the regional agenda through demonstration projects.

“Cooperation in innovation and technology transfer” an ERDF pilot project is one of the eight priority areas identified for the period of 1995-1999. The other priorities related to:

- Internal inter-regional cooperation
- External inter-regional cooperation
- Cooperation in the Information Society
- Cooperation in new sources of jobs
- Cooperation with a cultural theme
- Pilot projects in spatial planning
- Urban pilot projects

In addition to the support for innovative actions in the regions carried under EDRF, the Research and Technology Development - RTD program of ‘INNOVATION’ supports a number of actions aimed at promoting innovation in the regions. These are:

- Helping the European Community’s regions to develop coherent and effective technology strategies, policies, and projects

- Assisting the innovation and technology transfer services and infrastructures in the regions
- Providing technical support to DG XVI (Regional and cohesion policy)

ACTION PLAN FOR INNOVATION IN EUROPE

The two editions of the Green Paper scrutinize innovation from quite interesting points of view. The following points should be considered as examples:

- The first edition has a broad reference to innovation as follows: *“The capacity for innovation involves various policies: industrial policy, research and technology development - RTD policy, education and training policy, tax policy, competition policy, regional policy, and policy on support for SMEs, environment policy, etc.”* This section, however, has been deleted in the second edition!
- The following reference to social innovation has been added to the second edition: *“Innovation is not just an economic mechanism or a technical process. It is above all a social phenomenon. The history, culture, education, political and institutional organization and the economic structure of each society determine that society's capacity to generate and accept novelty. The most recent **definition of technological innovation** is that contained in the **Oslo Manual** adopted in 1992 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development - OECD. Practical application of the manual revealed weakness or inadequacies, particularly as regards **social or organizational innovation.**”*

The Green Paper initiated a set of feedbacks, which have been documented in “Action Plan for Innovation in Europe”. The response of the Portuguese Government deserves a particular attention.

- The formulation of the European Paradox involves a linear and out-of-date vision of the phenomenon of innovation. The R&D policies and a possible Community Innovation Policy can neither remedy the gaps of the industrial policies and of Enterprise Policies, nor solve major problems, such as the distribution and demonstration, which are of a prime necessity for the SMEs. For Portugal, the transfer of resources of the R&D programs towards a Policy of Innovation appears to be missing viability at the political and economic levels.
- Portugal considers that the Green Paper tackles only in a limited way the problem of the links between innovation, growth and employment. It is not the technologies which can solve the problems of the organizations, or which create new opportunities for the companies, but their innovative application, including the new forms of social and organizational innovation. In this respect, Portugal also wishes the implementation of actions referring to town planning and to the revitalization of the rural areas, teaching and the training, health and problems of the 3rd age.

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