



The North Sea Programme Joint Annual Conference 2007, Brunstad, Norway, 21st June

Rapporteur's Notes for Seminar on Priority 1 – Building on our Capacity for Innovation

“Creating Real Projects on Research Clusters, ICT Applications and Society Capacity for Innovation”

Speakers:

Simon Tijmsma, Head of Economic Affairs, Recreation and Tourism, Province of Fryslan, the Netherlands

Peter Cook, Head of Innovation and International Markets, Exdra, Essex Development and Regeneration Agency, UK

Panel:

Nicole Schäfer, Federal Office for Building and Regional Planning (BBR)

Khoji Wesselius, Northern Netherlands Assembly

Ulrich Müller, “ICT4SMEs” project

The North Sea Programme Secretariat:

Matthias Woiwode von Gilardi, Erik Fuglsang

Concluding summary (Secretariat):

The session comprised of two keynote speeches on both the programme profile with regard to the theme of promoting innovation, and future perspectives in this field for the North Sea Region. A panel of experts from different stakeholder organisations, and the audience reflected upon the interventions.

The following summary reflects the discussion during the seminar and attempts to draw conclusions of the key issues covered.

The seminar showed that it would be important to create a common understanding amongst all parties addressed by the priority 1 on ‘Building on our Capacity for Innovation’. This is particularly relevant for the innovation theme where the programme endeavours to engage a range of ‘new customers’, stakeholders and target groups. Experience from the Interreg IIIB programme shows that transnational innovation projects are complex and require a new quality of stakeholder engagement.

Innovation is addressed as an own priority, where it is possible to identify the specific demands related to innovation promotion and address the specific relevant target groups. However, innovation in the NSR remains a crosscutting theme, as it is relevant for many other topics and sectors addressed in the programme, e.g. energy (Priorities 2 and 4) or transport/logistics (Priority 3). Projects will have to choose the priority they consider suitable for their actions, depending on the specific project focus.

In this regard it is of particular importance to link actions to other sector and specialist programmes that are designed to address more technical, science and technology as well as business-related

issues within the field of innovation. The North Sea Region Programme complements these with a clear emphasis on policy-making, capacity building, and framework setting in a regional, that is territorial perspective.

The session identified the need for projects to set up appropriate partnership structures and prepare actions that are designed to provide good framework conditions that are conducive to innovation, thus taking account of the fact that innovation is not an event that happens in a planned way but a process. Project funding will in this way act as seed or risk capital that is needed for innovation processes, where methods, technologies and models are explored and applied more widely in the NSR. The NSR can be a playground for testing how innovation processes can work best. Think different is the motto.

'Innovation' is also about where innovation takes place. Linked to this equally important and difficult question is the need to identify the conditions conducive for innovation processes and in what way they are related to the profile and assets of a region, be it urban or rural, dynamic or stagnating, declining or expanding, or remotely, peripherally or centrally located. Projects will have to provide evidence that through their actions the regions are more successful in driving innovation and better placed in a competitive global environment to attract people and investment. To be effective stakeholders need to engage politicians to support the territorial approach employed in the North Sea Region Programme in order for it to be an instrument that makes a difference.

A central question in this context is how we can make strengthen institutions and ways of governance and administration, which can help achieving territorial impact. The greatest challenge is to build sustainable, long-lasting structures during the project lifetime to provide support services in the long-term, based on own finance after project end. This will give SMEs the confidence to invest into new ideas.

It is a challenge and, because of the integrated and multi-level character of partnerships a great opportunity to make use of the benefits of transnational networks that generate added value (social capital, capacity and competence) to the local level in order to achieve the Lisbon Agenda. Projects may bring local needs together in the transnational context, e.g.

- to access bigger markets that have a genuine transnational dimension and are transnationally organised,
- by building networks of relevant institutions,
- by providing favourable conditions for businesses, e.g. in support of the above, particularly with regard to the need for SMEs to "internationalise" their business processes, and
- by building common ground for action in economic development (e.g. foresight planning) and facilitate 'cross-over' of resources, competences and knowledge.

For business development agencies, incubators and other organisations representing the 'new customers' of the programme, 'innovation' may just be defined as "things that lead to business development and provide access to new markets, and not just based on technological development".

Funding is an issue especially for SMEs, but similarly important is to support these with regard to knowledge and know-how in funding opportunities, use of ICT, business models and specialist incubation facilities, and benefits from B2B and cross-sector cooperation, including higher education and public sector institutions. The North Sea Region Programme can complement funding-sources at different levels (e.g. local) and for different sectors and facilitate specific co-operation arrangements that help to respond to challenges from market integration and globalisation.

Thus, SMEs and citizens can directly benefit and be supported through institutional support structures created in transnational innovation projects (otherwise state aid restriction).

The seminars was closed by emphasising the opportunity created by the North Sea Region Programme, i.e. to think different in networks, test solutions and learn from each other.

Presentations can be downloaded from our website

<http://www.northsearegion.eu/ivb/events/show/&tid=18>