

# Joint Annual Conference 2009: Sustainable Innovation for the North Sea Region

## Background Paper about the Theme of the Joint Annual Conference 2009

### EU Policy Background

The **EU policy framework** highlights innovation as an essential component to increase the competitiveness of regional economies in Europe with the ultimate goal to maintain our welfare and quality of life.

This goal highlights the strong **social and environmental dimension** that innovation incorporates. It emphasises that innovation is not just to be deployed to enhance economic performance. Innovation policy is placed in the context of the overall strategic policy agenda of the EU, particularly the renewed Sustainable Development Strategy of the EU (SDS) and the Lisbon Agenda.

The **EU Commission's 'Blue Book' on Integrated Maritime Policy** promotes the cross-sectoral approach in the context of sea-related policies and emphasises the need for a knowledge and innovation base for the maritime policy. It recognizes that research, innovation and technology are crucial for the sustainable development of sea-based activities.

The Green Paper on **Territorial Cohesion** adopted by the European Commission in October 2008 strengthens the shift from traditional sectoral approaches to place-based approaches in relation to innovation policies. It favours an integrated approach to strengthen the EU's economic competitiveness and capacity for growth while respecting the need to preserve its natural assets and ensuring social cohesion.

**Protection and management of water** in a sustainable and innovative way is a key element for coastal zone management and tackling risk posed by a changing climate in the North Sea region. Implementation through the Programme is linked to the relevant European community frameworks.

For highly developed regions, such as the **North Sea Region**, the continuing challenge is to reinforce the attractiveness by increasing the competitiveness. Innovation is the key tool for achieving competitiveness; transnational cooperation offers the opportunity to innovate in a territorial instead of sectoral-based approach.

### What is Sustainable Innovation?

Sustainable development means meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the needs of future generations. Sustainable activities should involve economic, social and environmental issues and develop those in a mutually reinforcing way. Resulting priorities include combating climate change, ensuring sustainable transport, addressing demographic and social inclusion issues and managing natural resources more responsibly.

Innovation, on the other hand, refers to the introduction of new or improved products, services and processes and applies to all sectors: Innovation ranges from technological to business innovation and from system to policy innovation and includes the commercial application of

knowledge. It is therefore directly connected to the competitiveness of an economy. Innovation is therefore fundamental to long-term wealth creation.

Innovation and sustainability are inseparable, as the Lisbon and Gothenburg Strategies show. The term sustainable innovation combines the two underlying concepts; it refers to new and innovative products, services and processes that incorporate the concept of sustainability and progress towards the goal of sustainable development and competitive regions.

Transnational cooperation offers the opportunity to involve economic, environmental and social elements in order to ensure the sustainability of innovation.

### **Sustainable Innovation through Transnational Cooperation**

The North Sea Region Programme is designed to practically implement the EU policy goals in a transnational setting. The Programme builds on the key aspects of the Lisbon and Gothenburg Agenda – competitiveness through innovation and sustainability. The concept of sustainable innovation is embedded in the overall aim of the Interreg IVB North Sea Region Programme:

**Investing in the future by working together for a sustainable and competitive region. To make the North Sea Region a better place to live, work and invest in.**

The main challenge on the Programme level is to find sustainable ways to address the key challenges as identified in the Operational Programme in an innovative way. Sustainable innovation needs strong cooperation between different sectors. Transnational cooperation offers the opportunity to innovate in a territorial-based approach and to involve economic, environmental and social elements in order to ensure the sustainability of the innovation.

### **Sustainable Innovation Related to Key Challenges for the North Sea Region**

There are a number of key challenges for the North Sea Region. To address these challenges the concepts of innovation and sustainability are in particular related to:

*Innovation capacity:* A key challenge is to create a framework and reliable conditions that stimulate innovation and to cluster the relevant sectors in order to ensure the sustainability of the region.

*Innovating for a sustainable environment:* Climate change has become a major threat for our common future. A combined effort is essential for accommodating the need to reduce green house gas emissions as committed in the Kyoto and Copenhagen targets and simultaneously to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The sustainable protection and management of water and coastal zones through a common framework is a main challenge in this context. An integrated approach towards maritime policy is a key aim for water related environment challenges.

*Innovating for sustainable accessibility:* A main challenge is to reduce the increasing social, environmental and economic costs associated with the growth of the transport sector and at the same time to achieve high and sustainable accessibility throughout the North Sea Region. An integrated maritime policy approach will contribute to meeting this challenge in the context of sea-based accessibility. At the same time accessibility through innovative ICT-infrastructures is an additional challenge.

*Innovating for sustainable communities:* As innovation tends to concentrate in metropolitan areas, a key challenge is to connect rural areas to centres of knowledge in order for them to complement each other and to utilize their full economic, social and environmental potential. Sustainable innovation is a main tool in order to find new and long-term solutions for areas around the North Sea.

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