

Project Objectives and major achievements during the reporting period

The General Objective of the Regional Innovation Strategy Project of North -East Region Romania is to contribute to the region competitiveness boost, through the development of the regional innovation support system, definition and promotion of the regional innovation culture.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To develop an organisational structure and a regional institutional framework to coordinate, to animate and to promote innovation in North-East Region.
- To build regional consensus about the priorities for investment of funding for RDI.
- To identify and develop potential innovative capacities in representative sectors of the region: food processing, wood, furniture, cellulose and paper, manufacturing, electronic & electro technical industries.
- To stimulate innovation demand from regional SMEs, developing their innovative and competitive potential.
- To involve all regional research and technology institutions in an operative and stable network at regional level in order to enhance their integration into the European Union and international circuit.
- To design technology and know-how transfer channels on three levels: regional, national and international.
- To stop brain drain to other countries and enhance the innovative capacity of the regional human resources.
- To identify funding sources for RDI activities, both public and private, and to elaborate a proposal of funding programme, based on the real needs and based to a regional consensus.

The project is a new approach of the innovation and TT sectors in the North -East Region. At the starting point there are no regional funding programs for innovation implemented, no regional networks/partnerships activated to support innovation. The links between academic, research and TT units with SMEs are not structured and organised. The innovation policy is coordinated at national level therefore no regional innovation strategy was previously developed. But, there is a good experience in the region on building regional socio-economic strategy, instrumented with valuable investment and infrastructure programs that demonstrated the region's capacity to absorb pre-accession funds and prepare sustainable projects (first region in Romania in terms of volume of funds absorbed and number of projects implemented).

The **DISCOVER NE ROMANIA** project has 3 stages of implementation and lasts 32 months. Stage 0 has started on 1st June 2005 and took 12 months (activities developed include work on packages 1-5), although the most important tasks of this stage have to be continuously ensured during the whole duration of the project and beyond: consensus building and awareness raising, mobilization and commitment of the key stakeholders of the regional innovation system.

Stage 0, aimed at defining the methodological and awareness frame for the RIS project and for the subsequent stages, was reached by activities developed under the following work packages:

- **Work Package 1 (WP1)** - Setting up the organizational structure and Regional Economic Trends Analysis - finalized
- **Work Package 2 (WP2)** - Involving regional actors and raising awareness of the project in the region - finalized
- **Work Package 3 (WP3)** – Analysis of Regional SMEs needs – started and to be defined in Stage 1

- **Work Package 4 (WP4)** – Analysis of Regional Supply - started and to be defined in Stage 1
- **Work Package 5 (WP5)**– Analysis of Technology and know-how transfer structures - started and to be defined in Stage 1

Specifically the stage 0 focused on reaching the following specific objectives:

- To develop an organisational structure and regional institutional framework to coordinate, to animate and to promote innovation in North-East Region.
- To build regional consensus about the priorities for investment and funding the RDI.

North - East RDA targeted the first objective by taking into account the results of the existing partnership developed for regional socio-economic strategy building. This partnership was activated in 2002, has a defined structure composed of 3 layers (county level partnerships, regional thematic groups and regional coordination committee), the role of the partnership was to contribute to identification of regional development priorities and specific intervention measures. Based on this structure, key decisional actors in universities, research centres, TT units, business support organisations and public authorities were invited to take part to the project managerial structures: Reference Panel and Steering Committee. Each structure covers the region both at institutional and territorial level. Most of the members in these 2 structures are also members in regional partnership for development, ensuring thus the use of experience and know-how accumulated in regional planning (in 5 years of work).

In order to promote innovation in the region, a database with 150 contacts was developed. The recipients received information on RIS process development; invitations to participate to public events related to innovation and projects & partnerships proposals on innovation collected by North-East RDA. This network was connected through e-mail in order to ensure possibility for feedback.

In order to build consensus on the RIS process, the project coordinator approached the following methods: good understanding and dissemination of the project objective, RIS methodology and achievements up to date – via awareness seminars, bilateral meetings and opening conference, good visibility of the project in the region and worldwide - via communication action plan.

The **main achievements** from stage 0 (1st June 2005 – 31 May 2006) can be summarised as following:

1. Setting up the organisational structure and the regional institutional framework to coordinate, to animate and to promote innovation in North-East Region: Management Unit (MU), Steering Committee (SC) and Reference Panel (RP) (deliverable 1, **WP1**); with the support of the Italian partner and International Process Consultant the appropriate actors were identified to be included in the structures that were activated on 08.02.2006. At the end of Stage 0 several meetings having been held that supported with recommendations the evolution of the project.
2. Contracting the International Process Consultant (IPC) – Mr. Jaime del Castillo (INFYDE Spain) (deliverable 2 **WP1**); the lead partner, North-East RDA, was in charge with this activity. The tender dossier for selecting the offer was prepared according to the Romanian Law for public procurement and the Guide to Financial Issues relating to Indirect Actions of the FP6 Projects. The contract was signed after an interview with Mr. Jaime del Castillo in Romania and preliminary consultation with Italian partner at 02.12.2005.
3. Prepare a work program and methodology to carry out the project in stage 0 of the project (deliverable 3, **WP1**); this activity involved the support of IPC and the consultation/agreement with Italian partner and project team (MU). The methodology establishes the approach for each specific objective and milestones to be achieved during this stage and the work programme indicates tasks and deadlines for each partner.

4. A thorough desk research was carried out in order to draft the Analysis of the Regional Economics and Trends (deliverable 4, **WP1**); the North-East RDA experts carried out this activity under the recommendations of IPC. The research involved the collection of information and statistical data sources (reports, strategies, regulations, surveys) existing at level of EU, in Romania and in North-East Region on innovation, R&D and TT sectors. Comparisons were made between statistical data at regional level and national level as well as other EU regions. The scope was to have a clear description of the situation in North - East Romania regarding the opportunities and resources available for innovation as well as major risks and impediments to the development and implementation of a sustainable RIS.
5. Involving the main regional actors and raise the regional awareness by building the regional consensus for the project objectives and activities (deliverables 14, 15, 16, **WP2**); because the RIS exercise was the first initiative of this kind in the region, the main issue was to promote the project among the RDA experts (50 employees) and the key partners of North - East RDA in the region (over 250 decisional bodies were involved in the awareness process) (deliverable 11, **WP 2**). To this campaign both Italian partner and IPC were contributing successfully;
6. Designing with the support of the partners and IPC, the structure of the questionnaire for the **company survey** (deliverable 19, **WP3**); the activity involved first of all a consultation and agreement process with IPC and Italian partner. The methodology to approach the implementation of this work package benefit from previous experience and best practices of the IPC and Italian partner in similar activities. The role of North -East RDA was to establish the channels to implement the recommended methodology in Romanian context.
7. Preparing a database of the regional existing resources (deliverable 26, **WP4**); The activity conducted by North-East RDA experts, was intended to serve to the preparation on the one hand of the Analysis of the Regional Economics and Trends, and on the other hand to the implementation of activities related to interviews and technological audits with universities and research institutes/units. The result consisted in a clear list of the organisations in the fields mentioned above with contact persons and addresses that covers the entire region.

The communication strategy (deliverable 9, **WP 1**) developed had 2 objectives: firstly to ensure communication inside the project partners and management structures and secondly to raise awareness in the region on the regional innovation strategy and innovation initiatives.

RDA North-East together with IPC prepared an **action plan** for the entire project taking into account the resources available, targeting to following **groups of actors**:

- local public authorities as decisional bodies at local level,
- regional representatives of National Agency for SMEs and Cooperation (NASMEC), regional representative of National Council of Private SMEs (NCPSME), representative of Ministry of Economy and Commerce (MofEC), representative of Ministry of Education and Research (MofER) as national coordinators of the innovation and R&D policy,
- SMEs in the region as source of information regarding the regional needs and potential beneficiaries of RIS strategy,
- Universities and R&D institutes/units as source of information for the regional offer and as potential beneficiaries of RIS strategy,
- TT units (technological parks, industrial areas and business incubators) in the region as regional bodies involved in innovation and R&D national policy implementation as well as potential beneficiaries of RIS strategy,
- general public as indirect beneficiary of projects implemented under the RIS strategy,
- international partners as potential sources of best practices on RIS and innovation projects,

- others RDA in Romania as potential partners in a National Association of RDAs, to exchange experience regarding design, implementation of a RIS project

The action plan included the following actions:

- organisation of several public events:
 - Project Launching Conference in Iasi,
 - two big RIS presentations in Iasi and Slanic Moldova,
 - four innovation related seminars in the region (Bacau, Suceava, Piatra Neamt
 - regular meetings of Management Unit(4), Steering Committee (2) and Reference Panel (2)
- press notes and press conferences issued at main public events (2)
- updated information about project activities inserted in four periodical newsletters of NE RDA.
- designed Internet platform to be dedicated to the project (under construction),
- preparatory activities started for the First Annual Innovation Forum tentative date proposed for 25th October 2006 in Bacau, Hemeius Information &Technology Park location.