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**A new transparent
European cohesion policy**

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What is Europe doing for us?

Regional policy is a very tangible policy, as evidenced by the 450 'operational programmes' currently being finalised in the Member States for the period 2007–13. It is a policy that impacts directly on the lives of all Europe's citizens and represents over a third of the European Union budget. For these reasons, it is important that regional policy becomes more visible in the eyes of all those who benefit from it, often without even realising it. The question of transparency, which has always been an inherent part of cohesion policy, is now even more critical than ever.

The new regulatory framework is a good starting point in terms of encouraging managing authorities, in partnership with the Commission, to develop information activities around the various projects supported within the framework of European regional policy. In particular, it introduces major progress in two areas: the obligation to organise annual communication events to support each operational programme, and the need to make public the list of Fund beneficiaries.

In practice, the objective is to communicate the positive impact of regional policy on the European economy, and to highlight its leading role in the implementation of the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs. To help convey this message, the Commission has strengthened the network of communication managers in the Member State managing authorities. Known as the Inform group, this network will now meet regularly to exchange experiences and good practices. The national networks of these 'ambassadors' for regional and cohesion policy are already in place in some countries. The priority now is to encourage the establishment of networks in the remaining Member States and to coordinate their activities at European level.

In this edition of *Inforegio Panorama*, you will discover that this process is not starting from scratch, and that many communication measures have already proved their effectiveness. We want to help make these better known.

The anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome should not be the only occasion on which we ask, 'What is Europe doing for us?' This is a question that should always be foremost in our minds and regional policy should always be part of the answer, demonstrating to citizens that Europe is very much alive.

Danuta Hübner

Member of the European Commission, responsible for regional policy





The 'Regions for economic change' initiative: networking for excellence in regional development

The European Commission has launched a new initiative to promote excellence in European regional development by supporting advanced networks for mutual learning and exchange ⁽¹⁾.



EU-supported research led to the development of computers specially adapted to hostile environments.

The new 'Regions for economic change' initiative will be dedicated to identifying best practice in economic modernisation, particularly in relation to projects contributing to the EU's growth and jobs agenda, and spreading this to all regions in order to stimulate regional growth and reduce economic disparities. Presenting the initiative, Regional Policy Commissioner, Danuta Hübner, said the aim was 'to make sure that bright ideas emanating from regional and urban networks find their way into the new programmes'.

The new initiative will bring together two existing instruments of European regional policy (the inter-regional cooperation programme and the urban development network programme) around economic development themes, selected by the Commission and consistent with the Community strategic guidelines on cohesion. It will function within the framework of the new European territorial cooperation objective.

The two instruments will have a total budget of EUR 375 million for the period 2007–13.

'Regions for economic change' will introduce a number of new innovations.

- Regions and cities will continue to have the possibility to form and manage their own networks but will also be asked to form networks around **themes** specifically selected to connect EU policies to the modernisation agenda.
- A new '**fast track**' option will provide a rapid testing ground for policy ideas emanating from Commissioners and their services. Within this option, the Commission will be the prime mover in setting up a network of volunteer regions and cities and animating the programmes.
- There will be a 'two-way bridge' between thematic development and mainstream European regional policy programmes.

⁽¹⁾ COM(2006) 675 final.

‘Fast track’ option

In addition to providing co-finance for ‘Regions for economic change’ programmes through the European territorial cooperation objective, for networks operating within the fast track option the Commission will also provide ongoing expert support and, if necessary, administrative back-up. The co-financing of proven ideas could ultimately be taken over by ERDF-assisted European regional policy programmes and finance may also be sought from schemes operated by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The Jaspers technical assistance initiative may also play a part in project development.

The European Commission will set out the themes to be pursued in cooperation with the Member States. It will then invite interested regions and cities to become part of the networks pursuing these themes. With the managing authorities, it will animate the thematic networks and collate results. Furthermore, networks operating within the framework of the fast track option will be offered expertise to develop action plans for testing and evaluating best practice methods.

‘Two-way’ bridge

Experience has demonstrated the need to establish a direct link between pilot schemes which develop new ideas and the European regional policy programmes assisted by the ERDF. This will be critical to the speedy and widespread dissemination and adoption of new ideas. ‘Regions for economic change’, especially under its fast-track option, will introduce arrangements which will make possible a two-way exchange. The initiative will also build on the experience of the EQUAL Community initiative, which is making an important contribution to the spread of best practice in areas co-financed by the European Social Fund.



Thanks to ERDF, the École des Mines in Albi, France, can test a new wine-making process.



The “MovellIQ” system from northern Sweden enables the teaching of arithmetic and spelling through movement.

Regions that develop ideas which prove to be examples of best practice — either in their ERDF-assisted European regional policy programmes, or other EU programmes, or in their own national or regional schemes — will have the chance to have them evaluated under ‘Regions for economic change’ and disseminated throughout the EU.

Member States, regions and cities participating in ‘Regions for economic change’ networks will be asked to demonstrate a linkage or bridge between their work within the initiative and their mainstream programmes. This aims to ensure rapid dissemination among the mainstream programmes of ideas piloted by the initiative. This linkage will be essential for regions participating in networks within the fast track option.

Themes for modernisation

The new regulatory framework for European cohesion policy 2007–13 sets out, under the overarching objective of economic modernisation, strategic guidelines for investment by Member States and regions. It calls on them to concentrate their investments as much as possible on the themes presented in the guidelines.

The choice of themes will vary between Member States and regions according to their relative economic strengths. This attempt at concentration will be further reinforced by the requirement to meet specific ‘earmarking’ targets.

Cooperation between Commission services, which facilitated the selection of themes, will continue throughout the implementation of the ‘Regions for economic change’ initiative, and especially in relation to the fast track option. The Commission’s leadership of the various thematic networks under the fast track option will be shared between different Commission services. The aim is to maintain a close link between Community policies and the thematic networks, thus providing an opportunity for different policies to pilot new ideas linked to economic modernisation.

Menu of strategic themes

The themes for 'Regions for economic change' and its fast track option can be grouped into specific policy fields, according to the three thematic sets of guidelines and the cross-cutting territorial dimension of the Community strategic guidelines. Particular attention will be paid across all these themes to improved governance and to the involvement of the private sector.

1. Making Europe and its regions more attractive places to invest and work:

- increasing adaptability;
- improving air quality;
- moving to a low carbon economy;
- improving quality of water supply and treatment;
- moving to a recycling society;
- making healthy communities;
- integrating policies on urban transport;
- developing sustainable and energy-efficient housing stock;
- improving monitoring of the environment and security by and for the regions.

2. Improving knowledge and innovation for growth:

- improving the capacity of regions for research and innovation;

- bringing innovative ideas to the market more quickly;
- training and retraining researchers;
- helping to restructure regions heavily dependent on traditional industries;
- bringing e-government to regions and businesses;
- improving ICT connections between regions.

3. More and better jobs:

- improving qualifications for innovation;
- promoting entrepreneurship;
- meeting the demographic challenge;
- promoting a healthy workforce in healthy workplaces;
- integrating marginalised youth;
- managing migration and facilitating social integration;
- improving the adaptability of workers and enterprises;
- expanding and improving education and training systems;
- increasing employment of older workers.

4. The territorial dimension of European cohesion policy:

- managing coastal zones;
- reaping the benefits of the sea;
- achieving sustainable urban development;
- re-using brown field and waste disposal sites;
- preventing and reducing floods;
- supporting the economic diversification of rural areas.

Conference, website, best-practice projects, awards

'Regions for economic change' is supported by an extensive communications effort in order to quickly spread best practice to all regions and cities in the EU. Key to this is the 'Regions for economic change' **conference**, to be held each year and timed to coincide with the spring European

Council. This will aim to clearly demonstrate the contribution which Community policies are making to economic modernisation and the achievement of the Lisbon objectives.

The first of these annual conferences, in March 2007, also marks the 'switching-on' of a new **website** for the exchange of good practice. At its launch, the website will contain details of 50 projects in the key policy areas of research, technical innovation, information society, sustainable economic development and financial engineering. These projects will be identified from existing programmes. By the end of 2007, the number of projects will have risen to at least 150. Each year, at the 'Regions for economic change' conference, the Commission will publish details of best-practice projects drawn from the different sources covered by the initiative.

An integral part of the communication activities of the 'Regions for economic change' initiative will be the **annual innovation awards, the 'RegioStars'**. The awards will recognise the best projects in the selected themes areas linked to economic modernisation. They will seek to promote good practice, stimulate the exchange of experience and provide visibility for innovative thinking. The awards will be presented each year at the 'Regions for economic change' conference.

More information: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/cooperation/interregional/ecochange/index_en.cfm



Farmers' cooperative sells local produce from a van in Strem, near Güssing, Burgenland, Austria.

From 'Brussels' to the projects: transparency in cohesion policy

By Ricardo Garcia Ayala ⁽¹⁾

Who are Community funds intended to benefit? How is the public informed about projects financed by the Structural Funds? What measures has the Commission proposed to ensure Europe's citizens are consulted and encouraged to participate? What is the role of the Directorate-General for Regional Policy in this long-term process?



| Horticultural research and development co-financed by the ERDF in Barfleur, Lower Normandy, France.

From its inception, the European Union has been dedicated to achieving economic growth, sustainable development, and economic and social cohesion between the Member States. It has established common policies, created the single European market, drawn up numerous regional development programmes, invested in building roads, hospitals, schools and water treatment plants, supported vocational training and job creation, and promoted research and innovation. In short, it has implemented a vast range of measures and provided financial aid to help achieve its stated aims.

However, it is not certain that the European institutions, including the Commission, have always succeeded in engendering a sense of ownership among Europe's citizens of these initiatives and of the global European project. Citizens are entitled to know where Europe is going and to have their voices heard. At the same time, the European institutions have a duty to listen and to respond to the views of European citizens.

European transparency initiative

To further strengthen the consultation and participation aspects of European initiatives, the Commission included in its strategic objectives 2005–09 an undertaking to increase the opportunities for stakeholders to be actively involved in drawing up policy. To this end, on 18 May 2005, it held a first orientation debate on a European transparency initiative, based on a communication from Commission President José Manuel Barroso and Vice-Presidents Margot Wallström and Siim Kallas. An inter-services group headed by the Commission's Secretariat-General was set up and, further to this group's activities, on 9 November 2005, the Commission decided to launch the European transparency initiative. Given the importance of these issues for regional policy, Commissioner Danuta Hübner and her services were closely involved in this process from the time the inter-services group was initially set up.

⁽¹⁾ Adviser to the resources director at the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy.

In relation to the European transparency initiative, the Commission identified three key elements, to be promoted through open public consultation:

- the need for a more structured framework, complete with common rules, for the activities of interest group representatives (**lobbyists**), and the need to strengthen and develop the Commission's policy on the participation of **civil society organisations** and other stakeholders;
- the establishment of minimum Commission standards for **consultation**, and to guarantee transparent interaction between representatives of economic interest groups and the Commission;
- reflection on the disclosure of information about the **beneficiaries of EU funds**, including the introduction of an obligation for Member States to reveal the names of beneficiaries of funds that are the subject of shared management.

Green Paper

These three elements were confirmed in the Green Paper ⁽²⁾ adopted by the Commission on 3 May 2006. The central theme of this document is the search for views and proposals on how to establish an agenda for a European communications policy. This approach is in line with the thinking behind the Plan D for Democracy, Dialogue and Debate that the Commission launched on 13 October 2005 to encourage the active participation of citizens in the debate on Europe. Plan D is the first stage in a long-term process aimed at consolidating the European Union's democratic foundations and rooting it in the values and expectations of its citizens.



Restoring a Romanesque fresco in the Sousa valley, Portugal.

⁽²⁾ COM(2006) 194 final.

Information and communication have always been among the key instruments used by the Commission in implementing the Structural Funds in the Member States. Actions are based on the principles of partnership, subsidiarity and rules of shared management. This implies that operations co-financed by the Structural Funds are managed in accordance with the competences of the institutional, legal and financial powers of each partner. It also means that the use of financial aid is the responsibility of Member States, notwithstanding the powers conferred on the Commission, in particular concerning the general budget of the European Communities. The rules include a detailed description of the obligations of Member States in connection with information and publicity measures on the Structural Funds, which are regarded as fundamental elements for the effective and transparent implementation of Community policy.

Awareness-raising in Estonia

Public awareness of the Structural Funds was a priority of the Estonian managing authority even before the Funds became available in 2004. The first 'road-show' to promote opportunities for project financing and development toured the country as early as 2002, and did so again in 2003. This generated considerable interest and even a certain degree of impatience among potential beneficiaries in advance of Estonia's full membership of the EU in 2004.

Currently, the single managing authority coordinates the work of an interinstitutional information team (all participating ministries and implementing agencies are represented), which is responsible for informing the public and prospective beneficiaries of the various possibilities offered by the Funds. This team includes 18 members and coordinates all awareness-raising activities and planning. In each of the 15 counties of Estonia, a network of county development centres is also helping to promote the Funds and to encourage the development of projects by local actors — NGOs, entrepreneurs and municipalities.

During the 2000–06 programming period, a series of information events were organised, ranging from thematic roundtables (such as in the field of employment) to seminars with over 200 participants covering all the operational programmes. Current activities also target newspapers, TV and radio, as well as the Internet. As a result of these ongoing activities, annual surveys have shown a high level of awareness of EU support in Estonia (84 % of the population). It is also worth noting that, at the beginning of 2007, Estonia had spent half of its total Structural Funds allocation for the 2004–06 period, and is on the course for full expenditure by the end of 2008.

Contact: Ministry of Finance, Tallin, Estonia.

www.struktuurifondid.ee



Opening of a creche in the Leipzig URBAN II area, Germany.

Information and publicity: concrete measures

In this respect, since 2000, the Commission, at the request of the Regional Policy DG, has adopted a series of information and publicity measures to be applied by the Member States. These measures include:

- a definition of the **principles and general fields of application** of information actions, which are designed to increase public awareness of Structural Fund activities and strengthen transparency so as to bring the EU closer to its citizens and make them aware of the Union's contribution to improving their quality of life and reducing regional imbalances;
- information and publicity measures aimed at **target groups**, in particular potential beneficiaries (local and regional authorities, economic and social partners and final beneficiaries), which highlight the opportunities offered by European aid, as well as information designed to make citizens aware of the EU's role in aid programmes and their results. The media (press, radio, television) must also be informed in the most appropriate manner.

For each operational programme, the managing authority appoints one or more persons to be **responsible for information and publicity** and informs the Commission of the content and implementation of the information and publicity strategy designed to ensure transparency with respect to potential and final beneficiaries. For investments above EUR 3 million, information billboards and commemorative plaques are erected.

Finally, the regulations included a series of rules and measures in relation to the follow-up of projects, such as the production of brochures, press information and seminars and conferences concerning operational programmes and the objectives and priorities of Community interventions implemented in the framework of cohesion policy.

Romania:

video clips for the pre-accession funds



In Romania, the Ministry of European Integration ran a promotion campaign in 2005 that aimed to publicise the 10 best projects co-financed with Phare money. They made 10 video clips (in Romanian and in English), of three minutes each, about projects such as the:

- development of an IT park in Hemeius-Bacau;
- restoration of the historic centre of Baia Mare;
- renovation of a sports centre in Resita;
- social integration of youth with disabilities through drama in Braila;
- modernisation of technical schools in Brasov;
- creation of a social centre for elderly people in Piatra Neamt;
- modernisation of the infrastructure of the Amara spa resort;
- setting up of a pottery school to support a traditional activity of the Negresti-Oas region;
- development of a maintenance service business in high risk conditions in Ramnicu Valcea;
- establishment of a centre specialised in art restoration in Alba Iulia.

The videos clips were broadcast on national television and are available on CD.

Contact: aurora.tranescu@mfinante.ro



Several cars of the new Sunderland underground, in the United Kingdom, bear the EU colours.

2007–13: three new tools

It is clear, therefore, that information and transparency are not new concepts in the management of the Structural Funds. The regulations and measures governing these funds include strict rules already applied in regional policy. For the next programming period (2007–13), these existing measures are strengthened and three complementary working and information tools are introduced.

- The first, which is essential for the effective provision of information, is a communication plan for each operational programme that needs to be prepared by the managing authorities and accepted by the Commission. The information measures should be aimed at potential beneficiaries, eventual beneficiaries and the general public. The added value of Community assistance should be emphasised in all information activities. The preparation, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of communications plans are the means by which the Commission intends to ensure effective transparency and sound management of the Structural and Cohesion Funds.
- The second tool which Regional Policy DG wants to see is increased **networking of communications experts at regional, national and Community levels**. The Community network foreseen should make it possible to improve cooperation and the exchange of experiences among the authorities in the Member States and the Commission.
- The third instrument to be developed under the European transparency initiative concerns the disclosure of the identity of Structural and Cohesion Fund beneficiaries. In this respect, the Commission's new implementing regulation stipulates that the managing authorities



Promoting EU funding in Spain.

must notify potential beneficiaries that accepting financial aid also means agreeing to be included on the list of beneficiaries. The lists, also including the project names and the amount of public funding granted to each operation will be published in accordance with Article 7.2(d) of the same regulation.

All these provisions are part of a long-term process which, in addition to contributing to a more effective use of European funds, also aims to better connect citizens with the Community institutions and consolidate the democratic foundations of the European Union.

What has Europe ever done for us?

Regional policy is among the main achievements of the European Union presented in the new 'Speak Up Europe' campaign which was launched in February 2007 by the international organisation European Movement with the support of the European Commission.

Central to the campaign is an animation based on an excerpt from the Monty Python *Life of Brian* film. The animation *What has Europe ever done for us?* is combined with a series of around 300 local, national and/or European events across the EU. These are supported by 25 localised web portals in 20 languages, containing online forums and multimedia content. The aim is to offer a complete debating experience to a large number of EU citizens.

Watch the animation at:

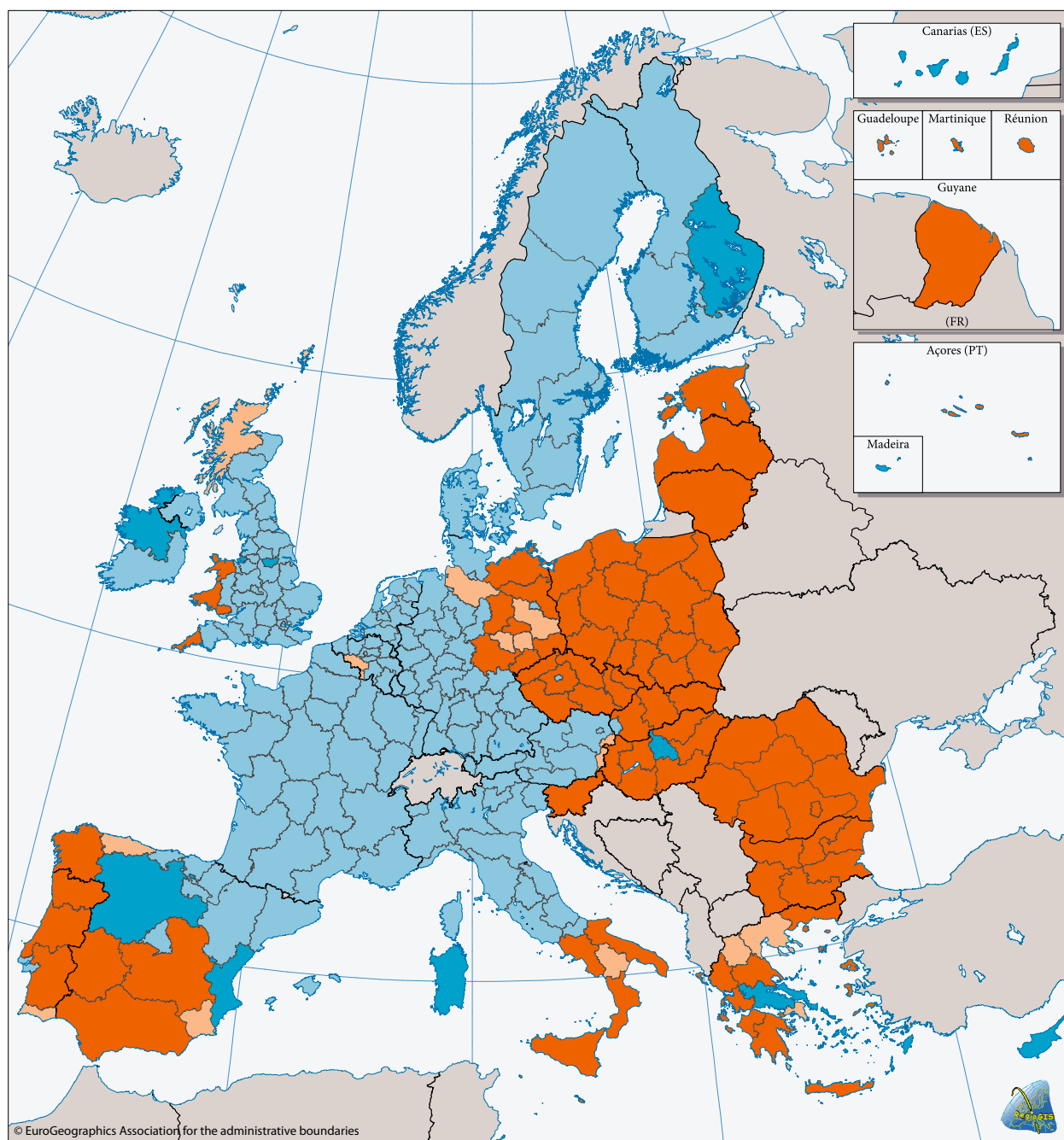
<http://www.whathaseuropedone.eu/index.php>

Site of the European Movement:

<http://www.europeanmovement.org/>



Electrification of Clare island, County Mayo, Ireland.



Structural Funds 2007–13: Convergence and regional competitiveness objectives

- Convergence regions
- Phasing-out regions
- Phasing-in regions
- Competitiveness and employment regions

Position as October 2006.
Regional boundaries in Bulgaria and Romania are indicative only

0 1 000 km

Working together for better communication: SFIT, Inform and national networks

By Barbara Piotrowska ⁽¹⁾

National and regional communication experts, brought together, improve the effectiveness of Structural Funds communication, boost the number and quality of project proposals and enhance awareness of the European Union and its cohesion policy.



The NOA centre in Antwerp, Belgium, provides services for 15 small businesses and a local café for the neighbourhood.

More than a third of the total EU budget, 347 EUR billion, has been allocated to the new cohesion policy 2007–13. When dealing with a budget of this scale, the European Commission cannot leave information to chance. Experience shows that citizens are often insufficiently aware of the role of the Community in funding programmes for reinforcing economic competitiveness, creating jobs and strengthening internal cohesion in their regions.

In agreement with the Member States, a number of information and publicity obligations have been established for the 2007–13 programming period, continuing the line taken in the previous period. Their main aim is to ensure

that funding mechanisms are transparent and citizens are informed of the objectives of these funds and the impact of the investments ⁽²⁾. The responsibility of the managing authorities is to provide information to potential beneficiaries and citizens. This task must be carefully planned and should continue throughout the lifetime of all programmes that receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), European Social Fund (ESF) and the Cohesion Fund. To ensure that the new rules are implemented efficiently, the European Commission intends to see all parties involved in the implementation of the operational programmes, including beneficiaries.

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⁽²⁾ Article 69 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006 of 11 July 2006 laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund; Articles 2–10 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1828/2006 of 8 December 2006 setting out rules for the implementation of Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.



Education in digital technology: learning about TV production in Västernorrland, Sweden.

The new rules for the period 2007–13 provide for the preparation of a communication plan, which identifies in detail the information and publicity measures necessary to bridge any potential gap. It should also identify the roles and responsibilities of each of the various parties involved. In each managing authority a designated person will be responsible for the implementation of information measures, to improve the exchange of information between the Member States and the Commission about the information and publicity measures. In this respect the Commission has established Inform bringing together those officials in managing authorities responsible for communication.

From SFIT to Inform

Inform will build on the positive experience of the informal network, Structural Funds information team (SFIT). SFIT was established at the request of communication officers in 2002. By the end of 2006, it comprised almost 100 members from all 25 Member States and had met eight times. Some of the more notable achievements of SFIT include:

- the publication of the *Practical guide to communication on the Structural Funds 2000–06* ⁽³⁾, developed jointly by the Information and Communication Unit of Regional

Policy DG and the network; a large part of the guide will still be used in the new period;

- the establishment of a database of almost 200 information practices, available on the Inforegio website ⁽⁴⁾.

Further to those tangible achievements, there have been equally important intangible benefits, such as personal contacts among participants from various Member States, which resulted in the organisation of additional meetings and informal but valuable exchanges of information. The biannual meetings were held in a friendly atmosphere with lively presentations on various information initiatives, such as a Structural Funds soap opera in Poland, a schools competition on the Structural Funds in Murcia (see 'From the ground' section) and a Hungarian website listing all the beneficiaries of EU funding, to give just a few examples ⁽⁵⁾. Every meeting was also devoted to working groups, where the participants, building on their experience and expertise, were able to further develop specific topics or look for solutions to common problems.

The new Community network, Inform, which replaces SFIT, aims to bring together communication officers from all the operational programmes in the framework of the

⁽⁴⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/outils_en.htm

⁽⁵⁾ The documentation of the meetings is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/events_en.htm

⁽³⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/country/commu/guide_en.htm



Parents and children at the new family centre for immigrants in Vantaa, Finland.

ERDF and the Cohesion Fund. The main objectives are to share experience and identify ways of improving the quality of communications activities, raise awareness of the benefits of Community interventions among potential beneficiaries and the general public, and improve the visibility of EU-funded projects. The suggested priority themes for the period 2007–13 are:

- **transparency:** integration of websites providing information on the Structural Funds and lists of beneficiaries;
- **cooperation** between networks at regional/national/Community level and possibly the Commission representations;
- **success stories**, highlighting the achievements of cohesion policy;
- **common activities towards media.**

The Directorate-General for Regional Policy has embraced and encouraged the establishment of the network and will support its activities and the exchange of information by documenting the process. It will also cooperate with a similar network for the European Social Fund, called INIO. A web-based platform, providing news and documents will also be developed by the Regional Policy DG.

The network representatives, an information officer appointed centrally and two or three information officers at the level of operational programmes, per Member State, will meet in Brussels. They will be asked to report the outcomes of the meetings to their colleagues in their respective Member States and regions.

Within the network, task-oriented working groups may be set up, to prepare thematic manuals, guidelines or reports on the following possible topics: preparation and implementation of the communications plan; transparency;

presentation of information on the beneficiaries; selection and presentation of success stories; information campaigns targeting specific groups; web-based information; working with the media and evaluating communications activities.

National networks

Ideally, national networks similar to those already in place in some Member States will also be established. Such a network is currently being set up in the UK, in cooperation with the Commission representation.

A conference, ‘**Telling the story — cohesion policy for growth and jobs**’, related to information and publicity on the Structural Funds will take place on **26 and 27 November 2007** in Brussels. Its objective will be to attract communication officers from all the operational programmes. Between 400 and 500 participants can be expected. The event will serve as an open market for presentation of different communication approaches and will provide various networking opportunities.



Sign advertising the construction of a new underground station in Prague, Czech Republic.

Hungary

“‘Hungary online’: innovation for active citizen participation”

Gabriella Lantos, National Development Agency of Hungary

In Hungary, the authorities have successfully employed a new ‘digital dialogue’, to facilitate active public participation in the debate on how best to use EU funds. The Internet is also being used to assist those wishing to apply for EU funds, thereby ensuring the highest possible degree of transparency.

Citizens sometimes have the impression that the most important decisions in their lives are being taken without their input. There is also a widely held perception that the EU’s institutional context is complex and not easy to navigate. These are valid concerns, which are not always without foundation. In Hungary, however, the authorities have taken steps to address these issues. In particular, enormous effort has been invested in satisfying public demand for information and in building social consensus around the future direction of Hungarian development policy.

The Hungarian government and the National Development Agency, which has responsibility for the management of EU funds, recognises the importance of involving as many people as possible in laying the foundations for the country’s future development. This is based on a strongly held belief that ordinary people know best what needs to be done and how best to do it. This prompted the National Development Agency to draft an electronic questionnaire, which was circulated to more than 5 000 different organisations in March 2006, requesting their views on the agency’s development proposals. Responses were sought from professional bodies, lobby groups, NGOs, as well as from business and scientific circles. The process was also open to the general public, who could download the questionnaire from the agency’s homepage, having completed a simple online registration procedure. Following a review of the results of the first round of the consultation process, in late July 2006 around 4 000 partner organisations were again asked to give their opinions on the ideas being presented. In parallel, there was also an ongoing process of consultation with the main professional and civil organisations.

Hungary leads the way not only in promoting social dialogue but also in the digitalisation of tender information. In order to convert a project from concept to reality, it is necessary for applicants to understand the EU tendering process. A detailed,

user-friendly EU search engine on the National Development Agency website now

means that anyone can search for a relevant tender. For those who have already submitted an application, the website also provides up-to-date information on its status. Progress reports can now also be submitted electronically. Furthermore, the full list of EU-funded projects and beneficiaries in Hungary is published here and updated fortnightly. This can be of enormous help in giving potential applicants a clear picture of the amount of support they could be granted and for what kinds of projects. The presentation of best practice is also designed to stimulate ideas and improve public understanding. At present the Agency, which reports to the Hungarian government, is also working on further IT developments. It will, for example, soon be possible to submit applications for EU support electronically, and Agency staff are also working on developing an online complaints management system.

For the future, the Hungarian administration is committed to ensuring maximum public participation in the decisions regarding the country’s development and complete transparency in relation to the management and use of EU funds.

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The Hungarian NDA communication team at work.

Latvia

“EU funds on radio and TV”

Sanda Rieksta, Head of the Information and Publicity Unit, EU Structural Funds Managing Authority, Ministry of Finance, Republic of Latvia



The year 2004 was a challenging one for the Latvian administration, with the receipt of the first tranche of post-accession EU funding. Latvia received EUR 625 million from the Structural Funds and EUR 710 million from the Cohesion Fund for the period 2004–06. That funding has been distributed to a range of projects, aimed at improving the road infrastructure, developing tourism, supplying clean drinking water, upgrading universities and research institutions, creating new jobs and improving educational programmes, as well as promoting entrepreneurship, farming, fisheries, etc. A public opinion poll in December 2004 showed that TV and radio were the primary sources of information on EU funding for 69 % and 41 % of the population, re-

spectively. They were also the most popular sources of information on EU funding in 2005 and 2006, which supported the managing authority's decision to use TV and radio to disseminate information about EU funds.

Regular radio and TV programmes started running in February (radio) and March (TV) 2005. To ensure the programmes were of the best possible quality, the managing authority organised an open competition to select the production team. The end result was a 20-minute weekly radio programme, *Keys to European funds* (*Eiropas fondu atslēgas*), which is broadcasted on national radio every Wednesday. The programme informs listeners about EU funds, provides examples of EU-funded projects, with site visits and interviews with the people and the local communities benefiting from the projects. Every second Monday there is also a 26-minute TV programme called *Eurobus* (*Eiropas autobuss*), which features EU-funded projects and explains how people can apply for EU funding. Eurobus is actually a minibus, which travels around Latvia, meeting people involved in EU-funded projects. In 2005, *Eurobus* started with a series of six steps to developing an EU-funded project, and then went on to introduce all eight implementing agencies in Latvia. As with *Keys to European funds*, *Eurobus* also undertakes site visits and explores peoples' experiences of applying for EU funds.

Both programmes have excellent ratings. When it started in 2005, the radio programme was reaching a 10 % share of all radio listeners or 45 000 people, by the end of 2006 it was reaching 7.3 % or 35 400 radio listeners. The TV programme reached 25 % of TV viewers in 2005 and went even higher, to 33 % or 230 000 viewers in 2006. By the end of 2006 a total of 99 radio programmes and 41 TV programmes had been broadcasted on national TV and radio. Anybody can join the exciting Eurobus ride or turn the *Keys to European funds* on the EU funding webpage: www.esfondi.lv by clicking on the TV and radio banner on the right of the page: <http://www.esfondi.lv/page.php?id=698>.

Contact: www.esfondi.lv



Filming a report on a Latvian farm.

IRELAND

Campus incubation centre



Total cost: EUR 2 673 685

EU contribution: EUR 1 905 000

The Midlands Innovation and Research Centre at Athlone Institute of Technology is a converging hub for innovation, research and enterprise in the Irish midlands. The MIRC provides incubation facilities for innovative and knowledge-based enterprise, an enterprise programme for entrepreneurs and start-ups, and makes available the resources and expertise of the institute to support client companies. Based in the MIRC, the Midlands & West Enterprise Programme is a one-year programme that provides entrepreneurs with the business skills, networks, facilities and supports necessary to navigate the business start-up process. The MIRC's mission is to drive economic growth in the region by accelerating the development of knowledge-based start-ups through incubation and business support. The MIRC/MWEP has incubated and supported 24 start-ups since 2003.

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PORTUGAL

The Romanesque art road in the Sousa valley



Total cost: EUR 3 535 179

EU contribution: EUR 2 651 384

Not far from Porto, in northern Portugal, the Sousa valley is notable for its Romanesque architecture, which dates from the birth of the Portuguese nation in the 17th century. Consisting principally of religious buildings, but also including towers and bridges, this architectural heritage is an important aspect of local culture and could, potentially, make a significant contribution to the development of tourism in the region. Recognising this opportunity, in 2003, the Association of Municipalities of the Sousa valley and the Norte region set up an integrated project, the objectives of which were to restore buildings in the Romanesque style, highlight their cultural significance, and generally promote the region's architectural heritage as an important tourist attraction. With the renovation work largely completed, the promotional and marketing activities were launched in 2006. The promotional activity aims to establish this 'Romanesque art road' as one of the principal tourist attractions in Portugal.

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AUSTRIA

Coffee theme park and competence centre



Total cost: EUR 1 513 000

EU contribution: EUR 302 600

Schärf World in Neusiedl am See, Burgenland, is a centre of competence and a theme park that is unique in the world. At Schärf World, special coffee blends are developed for the Austrian market and for distribution to a chain of 90 coffee shops in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia and the USA. Partners, clients and employees of the Schärf company are introduced to the secrets of proper coffee brewing and marketing. Over 700 workers from 200 different businesses have been trained in Neusiedl am See since it opened in 2005. After the construction of the park, with assistance from Objective 1 funds and regional venture capital, the company relocated from Wiener Neustadt to Neusiedl am See. At the end of 2006, 80 people were employed at the theme park and competence centre, many of them residents of Burgenland.

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POLAND

Support to the Nicolaus Copernicus University



Total cost: EUR 3 900 000

EU contribution: EUR 2 925 000

The Faculty of Mathematics and Computer Science at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun is regarded as one of the leading mathematical science centres in Poland and a regional leader in the teaching of informatics, mathematics and statistics at all levels. With EU support, the centre has recently been extended, and in a manner which is consistent with the original architecture from the late 1930s. The new wing consists of a lecture room with a capacity of 350 people, a conference room, 10 computer laboratories, 40 rooms for academic staff and several other facilities. A unit of the faculty, the Regional ICT Educational Centre, is also located in the new wing and is now accessible to the citizens of the region. It serves as a training and certification centre in a number of different areas, from elementary activities to advanced ICT technologies.

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The English peninsula between Objectives 1 and convergence

High tide in Cornwall

A beneficiary of Objective 1 in 2000–06 and eligible for Convergence Objective funding in 2007–13, the region of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly is experiencing a real socio-economic revival. From a rural region in crisis, dependent mainly on its primary resources and tourism, England's 'Finistere' is making the transition to a knowledge economy, recognising the value of openness, diversity, innovation and quality.



A panoramic view of the Eden project near St Austell.

'In one sense, this place is the perfect symbol of the way our local economy has evolved', points out David Brewer, chairman of the Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, referring to the photograph of a mining gallery. 'This area was previously used to test explosives; now it is being used to test the new robot developed by the university.'

A sign of the times, this robot — or a radio-controlled tracked vehicle to be precise — is more likely to be used for surveillance or counter-terrorism activities in high-risk areas, rather than for the revival of the local mining industry. Interestingly, the developer of this robot, Jobling Purser LLP, is one of the many university spin-offs now housed in the Tremough university centre, a key driver of the economic restructuring process that is underway in one of the most rural and remote regions in the United Kingdom.

'Our future was disappearing', says Nigel Hewitt, coordinator of the Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC). 'With the economic recession of

the 1980s, and apart from a few centres of excellence which we have in our traditional specialisations — fishing, agriculture and mining — Cornwall was experiencing a brain drain; every year, a thousand young people aspiring to higher education left ... never to return.'

The CUC initiative was introduced to counter this loss of local talent. *'The Combined Universities is above all an economic project, to help the region to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the knowledge economy', explains Professor Keith Atkinson, Provost of the University of Exeter in Cornwall, a CUC partner along with the University of Plymouth, University College Falmouth, the Open University in the South-West and eight higher education colleges. 'The idea was to "combine" all the higher education institutions in the region into a structured platform. The universities of Exeter and Plymouth immediately expressed interest in supporting and contributing to the development of this new tool for knowledge and development.'*

Unique in the United Kingdom and Europe, the CUC project has adopted a progressive approach. Phase 1 involved the construction of the impressive Campus Hub at Tremough and the addition or modernisation of buildings at the other specialist higher education establishments in Cornwall. The objective was to be able to accommodate over 2 000 students. Phase 2 was launched in March 2005 and also involves the construction of new buildings and the conversion of existing buildings, in order to be able to add a further 2 400 places by 2007. The total cost is EUR 220 million, EUR 95.4 million of which is being provided by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and EUR 16.7 million by the European Social Fund (ESF). A third phase is currently being planned under the new convergence objective, for which Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are eligible in 2007–13. According to Professor Atkinson, this new phase should foresee the development of a research centre for renewable energy.

Apart from the development of infrastructure and the academic offering (over 400 university courses are currently available), it is the spirit of innovation and the determination to convert innovation into commercial businesses and jobs that lie at the essence of Cornwall's new university centre. The CUC hosts international research teams, which have already developed several cutting-edge technologies, such as the radio-controlled vehicle. Other examples include: a highly sophisticated device for analysing particles from the ground, used in criminology throughout the United Kingdom; biofuel produced from recycled cooking oils, which is currently being tested in the diesel engine of a fishing boat; and a planned underwater plant ('wave hub') which uses waves for energy production. The university also generates spin-offs and attracts companies to, or close to, the campus, particularly those operating in the areas in which it excels: life and environmental sciences, engineering, design, communications, etc.

Unlocking potential

Established in London in the 1960s, Research Instruments Ltd moved to Cornwall in the mid-1970s, but it then outgrew its premises. With the help of EUR 750 000 from the South-West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), and in line with the image of its field of activity, it moved into a new, ultramodern building in Falmouth in 2003. Specialising in biomedical equipment, the company recently developed a device to enable the absolute traceability of the *in vitro* fertilisation process. *'A world first', points out the director, Bill Brown, 'which arrived just at the right moment, as it helps laboratories in the application of the European Directive 2004/23/EC on quality standards for tissues and cells of human origin, which has begun to be transposed in the Member States.'*

Will Thalliens is Colombian and graduated in microelectronics. *'What I enjoy here is working to resolve problems in an extremely cutting-edge field.'* As one of the designers of the new traceability device, Will is working at Research Instruments Ltd under the 'Unlocking Cornish potential'

programme, another novel concept in the United Kingdom, initiated by the CUC and receiving over EUR 6 million in ESF support. Here again, the emphasis is on retaining or attracting young graduates to Cornwall by offering work in local businesses. *'For one year, the graduates have the opportunity to acquire professional experience in line with their area of study', explains Allyson Glover, who coordinates the programme. 'In exchange, the host company benefits from the graduates' skills, as well as an Objective 1 subsidy of EUR 8 000, which enables it to pay the graduates a reasonable salary of at least EUR 24 000 per year, which is very good for this area. At the university, we provide assistance during the entire placement.'*

Since 2004, 180 graduates have taken part in the programme, working in 150 SMEs. Some 50 % of participants are originally from Cornwall, 60 % studied in Cornwall and most importantly, 72 % of them were employed on a permanent basis by their host company. *'We feel that training has brought about great progress in the region. We can also*



■ Textile design is a CUC specialty.



The architecture of the campus hub at Tremough combines modernity and traditional materials.

sense what I would describe as a renewed interest in industry amongst graduates', states Catherine Mead, director of Lynher Dairies Cheese Company Ltd, which resulted from the merger of two farms that wanted to take advantage of the growing demand for locally-produced cheese.

Star Academy

With the economic expansion of the universities and the local production infrastructure, three traditional Cornish activities — fishing, agriculture and tourism — are also moving up a gear. Assisted by Objective 1 investment, this rejuvenation has focused on three key areas: deseasonalisation, quality and innovation. 'Which boils down to the same thing', says Will Ashworth, aged 32 and director of Watergate Bay Hotel, an ideally located establishment on the north coast of Cornwall, which is a paradise for English surfers.

With the economic crisis in the 1980s, the family hotel experienced a fall-off in business. At the end of the 1990s, Will and his brother decided to open a beach hut, just below the hotel, and to launch an 'Extreme Academy' focusing on the latest water sports: surfing, kite surfing, windsurfing, etc. It was an immediate success. In 2003–04, the Ashworth family invested EUR 250 000 (EUR 60 000 of which was financed under Objective 1) to modernise the hotel in order to accommodate visitors to the Extreme

Academy. This has enabled the business to remain open throughout the year. 'We have to push back the frontiers of tourism. When you have the right product, you can work all year round and hire personnel — we have increased our staff from 15 to 80 employees — and also pay more', points out the young hotel manager.

But Will is most proud of the opening of the restaurant *Fifteen*, on 18 May 2006, also on the beach at Watergate Bay. This is the third, after London and Amsterdam, in the foundation created by the famous British chef Jamie Oliver. *Fifteen* aims to integrate disadvantaged young people by training them to become world-class chefs. The integration programme lasts 16 months. The young people first go to college for four months, then work one-year apprenticeships in one of the foundation's restaurants. On completing their training, they normally have no difficulty in finding a job, more often than not in a top-class restaurant.

In 2005, Jamie Oliver visited Watergate Bay and was impressed by the location. He was keen to open a *Fifteen* restaurant there, on condition that the project received public support. 'The project was developed in just a few months', explains Carleen Kelemen, director of the Objective One Partnership. 'Partners including the SWRDA, the Government Office for the South-West and Jobcentre Plus along with several other public and private partners, were keen to make the most of this opportunity for young disadvantaged Cornish people. Objective 1 aid of EUR 828 000 was agreed. The project was accepted in August 2005 and the restaurant opened in May 2006.' Like the Extreme Academy, it was a complete success: between May and December 2006, the *Fifteen* Cornwall restaurant, which provides 40 new jobs, served 65 000 meals. 'It's good for the young people, for tourism, for agriculture and fishing here: Some 80 % of the food used to prepare the dishes is of Cornish origin', points out Will Ashworth.

'The magic potion of *Fifteen* Cornwall contains three ingredients: a star, an entrepreneur and a public-private partnership', notes Jacki Williams, ESF director at Jobcentre Plus Devon & Cornwall, the employment agency.



Young trainee chefs with a bright future.

Ms Williams coordinated the recruitment of the *Fifteen* trainees: 'From the 250 candidates (all from Cornwall and aged between 16 and 24), 70 were selected for interview, 32 were admitted to college and 20 finally took part in the placement.' For Jacki, however, *Fifteen* Cornwall is only the flagship of a range of employment assistance projects that have been co-funded under Objective 1: the EUR 12 million of seed capital in this area has enabled 12 000 people to be assisted, integrating 4 500 people into the job market and training over 3 100 jobseekers.

One stop shop' for partnerships

The Objective One Partnership for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly — including the Government Office for the South-West and Cornwall County Council — the managing authority for the programme, have a unique structure that supports and develops local and regional partnerships and actively engages with the public, private and voluntary sectors.

The Objective One Partnership Office is the unifying voice for the programme and its functions include:

- acting as the information portal for the aims and successes of the programme (by means of a website, a freephone advice line and a newsletter on the forthcoming convergence programmes);
- communicating the benefits of EU investment in local economic regeneration to the public, the media, MPs, MEPs, local councils etc. (by sending press releases, regular updates to partners etc, website, conferences and events);
- referring potential applicants to project expertise and delegated grant funds (by means of a freephone advice line, website);
- maintaining an ongoing dialogue with the private sector regarding their needs in terms of economic regeneration (by arranging conferences, events and regular contact with a local private sector task force, designed to help the private sector drive the strategic investment of the programme);
- championing the cross-cutting themes of equal opportunities and the environment (a cross-cutting theme team was established to work with applicants).

For more information: www.objectiveone.com

Objective 1 investment has also provided Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly with another restructuring tool: broadband Internet access. 'Along with the university, it is certainly one of the main forces of regional renewal', states Ranulf Scarbrough, researcher-computer scientist and former manager of Actnow Broadband Cornwall, a public-private partnership established in 2002 by the Regional Development Agency, British Telecom plc, Cornwall County Council and other organisations institutions, to promote broadband. 'Our mission was to connect up half the region and 3 300

businesses to ADSL. Four years later, 99 % of the region is covered and 8 900 businesses (one in every two local businesses) are connected. In early 2007, there were over 101 000 subscribers, which represents a penetration rate of 37.3 %, compared with the national average of 30.5 %. Cornwall is one of the five most computerised regions in the UK.'

Approximately EUR 22 million (EUR 9 million of which is provided under Objective 1) allocated to broadband has enabled the creation or consolidation of 3 500 jobs and has increased Cornwall's GDP by EUR 123 million per annum. 'With training and innovation, broadband is the fabric of a modern economy', insists Mark Yeoman, deputy director of the Objective One Partnership. 'Broadband Internet is taking us towards a knowledge society. It greatly facilitates the marketing of our products and our openness to the world.'

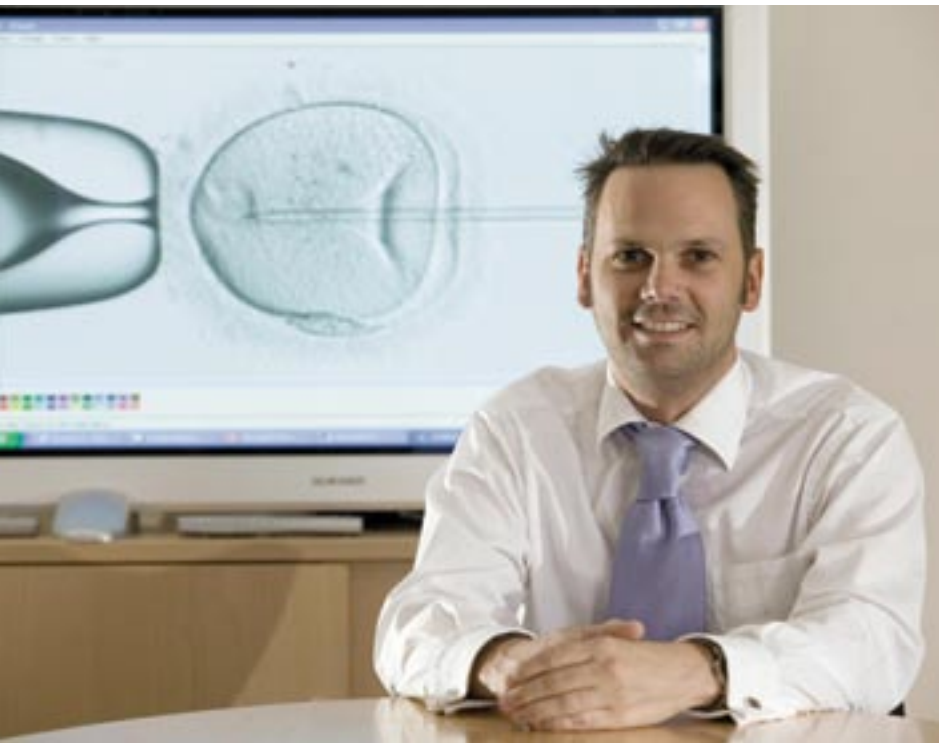


Customers enjoy haute cuisine at Fifteen.

Garden of Eden

Enjoying the sunniest climate in the British Isles, Cornwall has for a long time been a leading tourist region in the United Kingdom. With the boom in cheap air travel it has come under threat, however, since it is easier for someone living in London to get to Malaga or Faro than to any seaside resort in Cornwall. The region lacked a strong, new tourist attraction to respond to this threat —or at least until March 2001, when the Eden Project was launched.

Designed by Tim Smit and Jonathan Ball, two men with a passion for gardens, the Eden Project is a vast environmental complex dedicated to nature and sustainable development. Built in the immense, gaping hole left behind by a disused china clay quarry, a few kilometres from St Austell, the site consists of a series of huge, honeycomb-glazed domes, designed by the architect Nicholas Grimshaw. These enormous greenhouses, the largest in the world, are divided into two 'biomes', one reproducing humid, tropical climates and the other the hot, dry climates found in the Mediterranean. This hothouse nature reserve is home to over 100 000 species of plants from around the world. Apart from being a major tourist centre, it is also a very valuable place for studying and experimentation: the Eden



Bill Brown, director of Research Instruments Ltd.

Botanical Institute maintains close relations with other specialist centres and conducts research in the area of sustainable agriculture.

Built as one of the leading projects in Great Britain for the new millennium celebrations, Eden benefited from considerable national lottery funding (EUR 84 million out of a total investment of EUR 202 million), as well as European support, from Objective 5b (for fragile rural areas between 1994 and 1999) and Objective 1 (EUR 24.85 million). Objective 1 investment was mostly used to co-finance the construction of a magnificent educational pavilion, 'The Core', which was opened in September 2005.

The Eden Project, which employs 500 people, attracted over 8.2 million visitors between March 2001 and October 2006. 'And 38 % of them stated that they came to Cornwall because of Eden', adds David Meneer, marketing director. 'We are the third most visited site in England, after the London Eye and the Tower of London. In practical terms, the same economic study indicates that the proportion of tourists inspired by Eden to visit Cornwall accounted for an injection of over EUR 1 billion into the county's economy between 2001 and 2006.'

Growth

In December 2006, the Office for National Statistics announced a 6.7 % growth for the region of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, higher than the UK average (6 %) and just behind the three highest performing regions in the country — Gloucester, Wiltshire and North Somerset (6.9 %).

'Objective 1 was a fantastic boost for the economy of this region', notes Phil McVey, head of European programmes at the SWRDA. 'The challenge now is to capitalise on this success and "convert the try" with the convergence objective. It's an extraordinary opportunity which won't happen again, as Cornwall is now successfully overcoming its "less developed" status.'



Seafood Cornwall's director, Nathan de Rosarieux, 'flicks' mackerel from his line in St Ives bay.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Pilsen Science and Technology Park



Total cost: EUR 8 700 000

EU contribution: EUR 5 300 000

The original idea of building a science and technology park was shelved in the early 1990s and then revived again in 2002–04, when the city turned its attention to supporting advanced technology and the creation of a regional research base around the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen. Construction of the Pilsen Science and Technology Park started in 2004. The aim of the project is to stimulate research and development on a regional level and increase the competitiveness of small and medium-sized businesses by promoting innovation and the commercialisation of research results. The park will also provide career opportunities for graduates of the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and create the potential to attract research and development projects from elsewhere in the Czech Republic and from abroad. Building is expected to be completed in the second half of 2007.

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MALTA

Limestone heritage complex



Total cost: EUR 139 534

EU contribution: EUR 36 782

The Limestone Heritage in Siggiewi is a learn-through-entertainment complex, dedicated to Malta's oldest industry dating back to pre-history, the exploitation of local stone. From the quarry to humble abodes and princely palaces it is a journey through the ages. Built within the impressive surroundings of a disused quarry, the complex immediately proved a success with local and foreign visitors and after just four years of operations, the need for upgrading and expansion was felt. This new development included the upgrading of an audiovisual presentation on the subject. A new auditorium was furnished with fixed theatre seating incorporating multilingual box and all ancillary equipment. A website was designed and set up and 20 000 colour brochures produced.

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SWEDEN

Venture capital fund



Total cost: EUR 10 670 000

EU contribution: EUR 2 445 000

In Västra, which is an Objective 2 area in Sweden, there is a limited availability of venture capital and businesses find it difficult to generate their own capital growth. AB Vestra Partnerinvest was therefore set up to address this problem. AB Vestra Partnerinvest is part-financed by the ERDF and also has its own venture capital fund of EUR 5 780 000. It recruits interested cooperative partners (for example private investors or venture capital companies) with which it signs agreements. The partners then identify potential investment opportunities within the Objective 2 area and carry out an assessment of the companies concerned. If the partners and Vestra Partnerinvest agree to back a company, both parties invest equal amounts on the same terms. As a result of this initiative, to date a total EUR 2.14 million has been invested in the region.

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ITALY

Marimed — Fishing as a means of sustainable tourism development



Total cost: EUR 2 248 416

EU contribution: EUR 1 150 000

The Marimed Project — 'Fishing as a means of sustainable tourism development' — has experimented with an innovative model for promoting and developing sustainable tourism in Mediterranean fishing communities. By creating a network of public and private entities (institutions, local companies, educational bodies, tourism and fishing industry professional associations, etc.), the Italian, French and Spanish partners have shared and developed some common strategies for the development of sustainable tourism, respecting the natural and socio-cultural heritage of different Mediterranean coastal towns. Local maritime traditions have been used to provide new roles for fishermen as 'promoters and teachers of maritime culture', thereby providing them with new economic and professional development opportunities. Some new innovative tourism products which promote new maritime activities have also been explored, and the maritime identity of the local communities has been enhanced through the promotion of the fishing industry and other maritime activities, as well as local culinary traditions. The Marimed Project has also contributed to promoting awareness among the local population of the importance of preserving their environmental heritage.

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Murcia (Spain)

“A competition on the role of European funds in Murcia”

Inmaculada García Martínez, Economic Affairs Adviser, Murcia Region

Between 2000 and 2006, Murcia recorded the strongest economic growth of any Spanish region. This rapid growth can be largely attributed to the impact of the Structural Funds, through the various projects implemented under the regional operational programme (ROP).

As the managing authority for the ROP, we gave high priority to the Community regulation on publicising and providing information on Structural Funds programmes. Specifically, we drew up a plan to increase awareness among the citizens of the region of European Union activities, to familiarise the general public with the importance of European funds as a source of investment, and to highlight the fact that much of the infrastructure that facilitates everyday activities in the region — the schools where our children study for example — are co-financed by the Structural Funds.

Together with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture, we decided to organise an inter-schools competition for pupils aged 13–14.

We first adapted the board game *Crecemos con Europa* ('We are growing with Europe') by including questions on the role of the Structural Funds in the region of Murcia. The next step was to get a large number of pupils, teachers and schools to

participate. To achieve this, we ran an advertising campaign in the newspapers and on television. This helped us to attract 3 000 pupils from 80 different educational establishments.

The competition was organised into three stages: stage one was held within the individual schools with one winning team from each school; stage two was organised at municipal level, with a total of nine teams going forward; the third stage, which was broadcast on regional television, saw three of these nine teams competing in the 'grand final'.

An important factor in the success of the competition was the close involvement of the teachers. The quality of the prizes awarded to the participants and their teachers was also an important factor. The prizes improved with each stage of the competition (stage 1: board games; stage 2: electronic diaries and video consoles; stage 3: mobile telephones and mountain bikes), with the winning team being rewarded with a trip to Brussels, including a visit to the European institutions.

The competition, and particularly the prizes, was made possible by the support of sponsors, most notably the regional savings bank, who believed in the merits of promoting increased awareness of the activities supported by European funds.

Encouraged by the resounding success of this first event, held during the 2005–06 school year, we are now busy organising a second competition.

The concept could be easily transferred to other Member States. The rules of play and the procedures for organising the competition are readily transferable and easily adapted. To motivate participants and to promote the acquisition of knowledge about Europe and European funds, the importance of interesting prizes cannot be overstated.

To find out more: consejera-hac@carm.es
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Fourth 'Shaping best practice' conference

Fruitful discussions in Graz

'New horizons in Graz — Shaping best practice IV': from 15 to 17 November 2006, the capital of the Austrian Land of Styria played host to delegates from the EU regions who came to discuss the development of innovative projects, opportunities provided by the new financial engineering tools, and ways of promoting the knowledge society. The overall aim was to transfer the fruits of past experience to the 2007–13 generation of projects.



A view of the 'Graz City of Knowledge' business centre, Austria.

Graz is Austria's second city and third largest centre of economic activity, as well as home to a major university and a thriving cultural life. Throughout its history, it has been a crossroads between central Europe and the Mediterranean, a place where diverse influences have shaped a distinctive way of life. Graz was, therefore, an ideal host for delegates from the managing authorities of the Structural Fund programmes from across Europe — a total of 213 practitioners and experts from 21 countries, including Romania and Bulgaria — who came to exchange their 'best practices' at this fourth annual conference. A specific objective of this year's event was to examine how the lessons of the previous programming period could be used to improve the quality and impact of future projects in the 2007–13 programming period. To facilitate this, the workshops focused on three topics:

A. The generation and development of innovative projects — calls for proposals and procedures, the start-up phase, consolidation and support phases, creation of a 'domino effect' based on projects for innovation and R & D infrastructures, the role of clusters and development agencies — with the presentation of examples from the Czech Republic, Austria, Poland and Hungary.

B. Innovative financial engineering: in addition to public funds (including the Structural Funds) and traditional bank loans, other forms of financing, such as revolving funds or micro-credits, risk capital funds or guarantee schemes, can support the creation and development of innovative SMEs. Examples were presented from the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The Jeremie initiative (joint European resources for micro to medium enterprises), which was launched recently by the European Commission and the EIB group (the European Investment Bank and the European Investment Fund (EIF)), will also make it possible to channel part of the Structural Funds through the EIF to facilitate access by SMEs to appropriate forms of financing.

C. The knowledge society: projects that make a difference. The level of investment in new information and communications technologies (ICTs) largely determines the EU's potential for growth and jobs. The importance of projects encouraging the development of a truly inclusive information society, where the ICTs are disseminated among businesses, the public sector and households is undisputable. A solid public–private partnership, built on a triangular model (businesses, public authorities, research institutions), provides a suitable framework for such projects, as demonstrated by experiences in Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Combining tools, taking ownership of projects

The conclusions of **Workshop A** highlighted the importance of, and difficulties associated with mutually motivated cooperation between the world of business and the world of R & D, in particular in the form of clusters. The importance of the leverage effect of the Structural Funds in encouraging innovative projects was also stressed as many projects

would never have seen the light or experienced the same growth without such a support. The main difficulties lie with the institutional systems through which the Funds are distributed. Sound preliminary work — in gathering ideas and developing and preparing the practical aspects of a project — is a key to obtaining financing. A combination of complementary tools provides the best results, while not forgetting that every instrument has its advantages and its disadvantages, that the contexts are different and that there is no panacea.

The **Workshop B** debates showed that, through the leverage effect on private capital, the Structural Funds can be used to induce a change in the financing practices of SMEs, causing them to switch from aid to investments and to take greater 'ownership' of their project. For businesses, the recourse to risk capital can be a tool for competitiveness and innovation, in line with the Lisbon objectives. Nevertheless, experience shows that setting up an innovative system of financing requires a major effort in dealing with sometimes complex issues and, at the same time, complying with regulatory demands. It also means always taking account of the needs and capacities of small businesses.

Knowledge society: tangible benefits for all

The regional development potential of a strategy based on the knowledge society was clearly evident in **Workshop C**. Public services based on ICTs and tailored to the needs of individuals and businesses can, for example, bring real benefits in terms of growth and jobs.

When one or the other element in the partnership triangle (businesses, public authorities and research institutions) can act as the leader in implementing a project, the active contribution of all is vital. There is a need to concentrate on the already identified strengths of a region, drawing on the related experience and expertise, while at the same time pursuing an active approach to reveal new potential 'niches'. Regional innovation strategies (RIS) provide a useful framework for such an approach. Good education and R & D infrastructures are also among the criteria for success. As public aid is not unlimited, the long-term future of projects and programmes must be assured by ensuring their self-sufficiency. While significant results can be obtained in the short term, other examples demonstrate that time

is often needed to produce tangible benefits. However, regardless of how much attention is paid to planning and preparation, success is not always certain and luck is necessary. Failure itself — which is linked to the risks inherent in experimentation, ambition and creativity — can also produce an added value: the real failure lies in the inability to learn from projects that fail. Therefore, there is a need to stress the importance of good communications on the knowledge society and best practice in this field.



Communicating to transfer

In this respect, the Graz meeting succeeded in conveying a number of key messages to the managing authorities in the Member States:

- innovation is of crucial importance in achieving the Lisbon objectives;
- a knowledge-based economic revitalisation is essential for realising the competitive potential of Europe's regions;
- financial engineering tools, such as Jeremie, can produce a strong leverage effect and should be used wherever possible when developing new programmes;
- networking can maximise the dissemination of best practice and ensure an effective transfer of experience and expertise.

The testimonials and case studies presented during the conference were considered to be of a high standard. In particular, the emphasis placed on programme development and methodologies, as opposed to concentrating exclusively on individual projects, proved very interesting in terms of transferability. The region of Styria demonstrated an impressive political commitment as well as excellent hospitality. The structure of the meeting — starting with the 'heavier' presentations and ending with visits to local projects — was particularly appreciated. Proof of this excellent organisation lay in the high attendance levels at all the sessions.

More information: <http://www.best-practice-graz.at>

REGIO and Networks

Open Days 2007

Some 170 representatives from regions and cities were present on 13 December 2006 when Gerhard Stahl, Secretary-General of the Committee of the Regions, and Graham Meadows, Director-General of the European Commission's Regional Policy DG, launched the Open Days 2007. Under the theme 'Making it happen: regions deliver growth and jobs', European regions and cities are invited to set up partnerships and to apply to take part in the event between 8 and 11 October 2007 in Brussels. Open Days 2007/ — European Week of Regions and Cities is being jointly organised by the Committee of the Regions and the Directorate-General for Regional Policy of the European Commission.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2007/index.cfm

Support for the evaluation of operational programmes

Five working documents on evaluation (ex-ante evaluation, indicators for monitoring and evaluation, guidance on cost-benefit analysis, additionality and ongoing evaluation) are now available on the Inforegio website. The documents were produced for the benefit of national and regional authorities responsible for implementing cohesion policy programming. They are based on the experience gained during the current programming period (2000–06) and provide the managing authorities with the tools to undertake a sound programming exercise and thereby make efficient use of European funds.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/working/sf2000_en.htm

15 years of innovative strategies and actions

The Directorate-General for Regional Policy has published a study of the results of regional experimentation supported by the European Union over the last 15 years, and also including the methodologies and tools which can now be used by regions when developing their innovation strategies. The study contains practical guidance and good practices which could be useful to Member States, regions and other partners in preparing for the new 2007–13 programming period.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/innovation/library_en.htm

Guide to cross-border cooperation

Drafted by the Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière (the French Interreg networking unit) an updated *Guide to trans-frontier cooperation* has just been published by the Council of Europe. The guide describes the legal framework for cross-border cooperation and highlights a number of good practices and methodologies used in the implementation of cross-border cooperation actions between local and regional authorities located in the territory of the Council of Europe.

http://www.espaces-transfrontaliers.org/en/studies/practical_guide_en.pdf

REGIO diary

Dates	Event	Place
16–17 April 2007	'Future challenges for local and regional authorities: how can space technology help?' http://www.eurisy.org	Barcelona (E)
25–27 April 2007	'Communicating to change our behaviour' www.energie-cities.org/conference	Brasov (RO)
9–12 May 2007	'Transnational and cross-border dimensions of transport policy' http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A2=ind0611&L=urban-regional-planning&T=0&X=50F1401B5DFA577E69&Y=d.stead%40tudelft.nl&P=18	Porto (P)
10–11 May 2007	Baltic Sea Region programme 2007–13 Conference http://www.spatial.baltic.net/news_frame.php?language=&ID=419	Hamburg (D)
14–15 May 2007	'Bridging the broadband gap: reaping the benefits of broadband for rural areas and less developed regions'	Brussels (B)
12 June 2007	Inform meeting	Brussels (B)
8–11 October 2007	Open Days 2007 — European Week of Regions and Cities http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/od2007/index.cfm	Brussels (B)
27–28 October 2004	Fourth Cohesion Forum	Brussels (B)
26–27 November 2007	'Telling the story — cohesion policy for growth and jobs'	Brussels (B)

Latest publications

Regions for economic change — fostering competitiveness through innovative technologies, products and healthy communities



http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/competitiveness/doc/pdf/foster200703.pdf

Available in 19 languages.

Regions for economic change — regional policy responses to demographic challenges

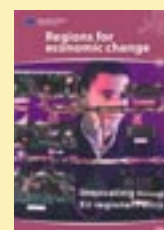


The Union's cohesion policy provides Member States with a valuable tool to adapt regional and national economies in the context of ageing.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/demographicchallenge_jan07/doc/pdf/brochure_v06_120107.pdf

Available in 19 languages.

Regions for economic change — innovating through EU regional policy



The challenge of research and innovation for 2007–13, illustrated through 15 ongoing projects.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/conferences/innovating_june06/doc/juneseminabrochure.pdf

Available in 19 languages.

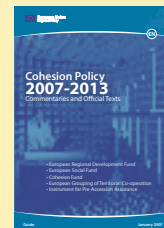
The Urban Dimension in Community policies 2007–2013



The contribution of cities and urban areas to growth and jobs in the regions

Available in 20 languages.

Cohesion policy 2007–13 — commentaries and official texts



http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docoffic/official/regulation/pdf/2007/publications/guide2007_en.pdf

Available in 21 languages.

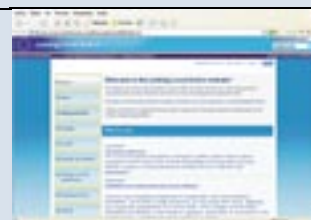
<http://cordis.europa.eu/fp7>

The official information service for participation in the new seventh framework programme for research and technological development (FP7) was launched on CORDIS in December 2006. CORDIS is a free online Community research and development information service, which is managed by the Publications Office. The new web-site on information on the first round of calls for proposal under the FP7 was launched on 22 December 2006. With a budget of almost EUR 54 billion over the next seven years (2007–13), FP7 is the first EU research programme to include dedicated actions for the regions: the 'regions of knowledge' initiative and the 'research potential of convergence regions'. The new FP7 participation service aims to provide researchers, companies, professional bodies and regional actors with a wealth of timely and accurate information, including the latest news, forthcoming events, notice of key developments and previews of what's next.



http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/local_employment/lla

Supported by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the 'linking local actors' project started in January 2006. The project's new web-site, which is now accessible in 20 languages, provides local development actors with news and information on events and funding opportunities. It also enables them to search for partners and examples of best practice in local employment development (LED) and to take part in discussion forums.



<http://www.silvereconomy-europe.org/>

The 'SEN@ER — Silver Economy Network of European Regions' is a joint initiative of European regions initiated by the region of North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany). This European initiative regards the ageing of our society not as a threat but rather as a challenge, and as an opportunity for regional economic growth and competitiveness. SEN@ER is a European-wide network which currently has 12 partner regions. Its primary objective is to promote the development and marketing of innovative products and services aimed at the growing older market segment, thereby contributing to regional development and job creation.



<http://www.ucm.org.cy>

The Union of Cyprus Municipalities (UCM) is the main association of local authorities in Cyprus. Its main functions are to contribute to the development of local government autonomy in Cyprus and to represent local government interests vis-à-vis relations with central government and with other national institutions. It also plays an active role in relations between Cyprus and the European Union. The UCM website is produced in Greek and English and facilitates access to a wide range of information, including a newsletter and various other publications. It also includes useful links.



Factsheets on cohesion policy 2007–13

Factsheets on cohesion policy 2007–13 in each of the 27 Member States can be accessed online via an interactive map by clicking on the country of your choice. The factsheets contain a map of the EU with an overview of cohesion policy 2007–13 and specific information on the Member State's eligible regions and financial allocations. A comparison with the 2000–06 programming period is also provided.

http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/atlas2007/fiche_index_en.htm

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