INNOGROW
Interreg Europe

European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

A3.1: Input paper for the organisation of the interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural SMEs

February 2017

Lombardy Foundation for the Environment, FLA

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1 Introduction

The "Regional policies for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs – INNOGROW" is an Interreg Europe project that aims to improve partners' policies on rural economy SMEs competitiveness regarding the integration of new production technologies and business models that lead to innovative products. The project will promote the adoption of innovation by rural economy SMEs, through sharing practices / experiences between regions and actors relevant to rural economy SMEs competitiveness, and integrating lessons learnt into regional policies and action plans.

This document is the first deliverable of INNOGROW Activity A3.1, which foresees the organisation of an interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs. The aim of the input paper is to be used as the primary source of knowledge for the capacity building and interregional learning processes of the policy workshop.

The input paper will define the most relevant issues to be discussed and addressed by regional authorities, provide guidelines and directions for the workshop topics and focal points; and present workshop delegates with the most relevant needs & challenges to be addressed through regional policies. It will also specify the organisational details of the workshop to be hosted by FLA and provide guidelines on how to prepare the workshop summary report so as to facilitate the integration of its results/findings into the INNOGROW action plans.

The report is structured as follows: section 2 outlines the key activities of the INNOGROW project; section 3 demonstrates the added value and strategic orientation of interregional workshops; and section 4 defines the scope and objectives of the workshop, presenting organisational details such as date, duration, participants, format and agenda. Section 5 presents the research conducted for the collection of cases of established innovation support centres in EU countries. Section 6 provides recommendations in the form of topics to be presented and discussed in the workshop. Finally, section 7 elaborates on how to build upon the conclusions of the workshop.

2 The INNOGROW project

The "Regional policies for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs – INNOGROW" project aims to improve partners' policies on rural economy SMEs competitiveness as regards the integration of new production technologies and business models that lead to innovative products. The project will promote the adoption of innovation by rural economy SMEs, through sharing practices/experiences between regions and actors relevant to rural economy SMEs competitiveness and integrating lessons learnt into regional policies and action plans.

Rural economy SMEs need to remain globally competitive by adopting innovative solutions, new business models and modernisation approaches that will lead to increases in productivity and access to new markets. Territorial capacity building and policy innovation involving all regional actors are critical factors for promoting the diffusion of innovations, to maintain and strengthen SMEs' competiveness and consequently regions' growth. Regions in rural areas can play an important role in the modernisation of existing SMEs and the proliferation of innovative start-ups, providing incentives to promote the adoption of technological innovations, such as organic farming, functional food, crop resistance systems, selective breeding and feeding processes to boost livestock resistance to local conditions. At the management level, incentives need to be provided for mixed production of crops and livestock products, and new business models and coalitions that lead to innovative business ideas.

2.1 INNOGROW activities

INNOGROW brings together 9 partners from 8 countries, involving the managing authorities & regional bodies influencing regional and national policy instruments, to promote the adoption of technology and business model innovations by rural economy SMEs. To boost SMEs' competitiveness and foster rural development, the project includes a wide range of activities, focusing on promoting the interregional learning process and the exchange of experience among regional authorities. Project activities include:

- Investigation of innovative technologies' impact on rural economy SMEs competitiveness and productivity.
- Identification of successful new business models for rural economy SMEs.

- Evaluation and analysis of existing policies and strategies related to the promotion of innovation in rural economy SMEs.
- Analysis of the factors (barriers and enablers) that influence rural economy SMEs to adopt innovation.
- Promoting public dialogue and consultation process to build consensus and ensure the successful implementation of regional action plans, through the support and participation of key regional stakeholders.
- Fostering interregional learning and capacity building through workshops, study visits, and policy learning events.
- Development of transferable tools & resources to promote benchmarking and policy learning, and transfer knowledge and lessons learnt beyond the partnership.
- Joint development of action plans to promote the improvement of the policy instruments addressed by the project.
- Increasing awareness, promoting and disseminating the project results and knowledge beyond the partnership.

2.2 INNOGROW expected results

INNOGROW will improve 8 policy instruments, relevant to the abovementioned policy areas, targeting to achieve:

- Enhanced innovation support services for over 5% of rural economy SMEs in partners' regions.
- Improved horizontal & vertical cooperation among SMEs in rural areas for products commercialisation.
- Increased capacity of 200 staff of public administrations to effectively implement policies, stimulating innovation adoption by rural economy SMEs.
- 10 million of Euros of investments unlocked to promote innovative technologies and new business models.

3 Added value and strategic orientation of INNOGROW workshops

Exchange of experience through workshops is an interregional learning process, which is considered the main catalyst for generating the expected policy change in the participating regions. The production of new knowledge at the regional level relies on multi-actor innovation networks/communities, in which key stakeholders and policy makers come together to find solutions and answers to various social, economic and environmental problems, associated with policy development.

The INTERREG programme suggests that knowledge and expertise sharing should be an indispensable component of the efforts of regional authorities to build capacity and drive sustainable policy development. The rationale is that the co-production of knowledge and mutual understanding constitutes a co-created and sustained process; where various partners bring different knowledge, information and ideas to the table, and the consultation process ends up yielding added value for all parties involved; preventing inter alias the duplication of efforts and waste of resources.

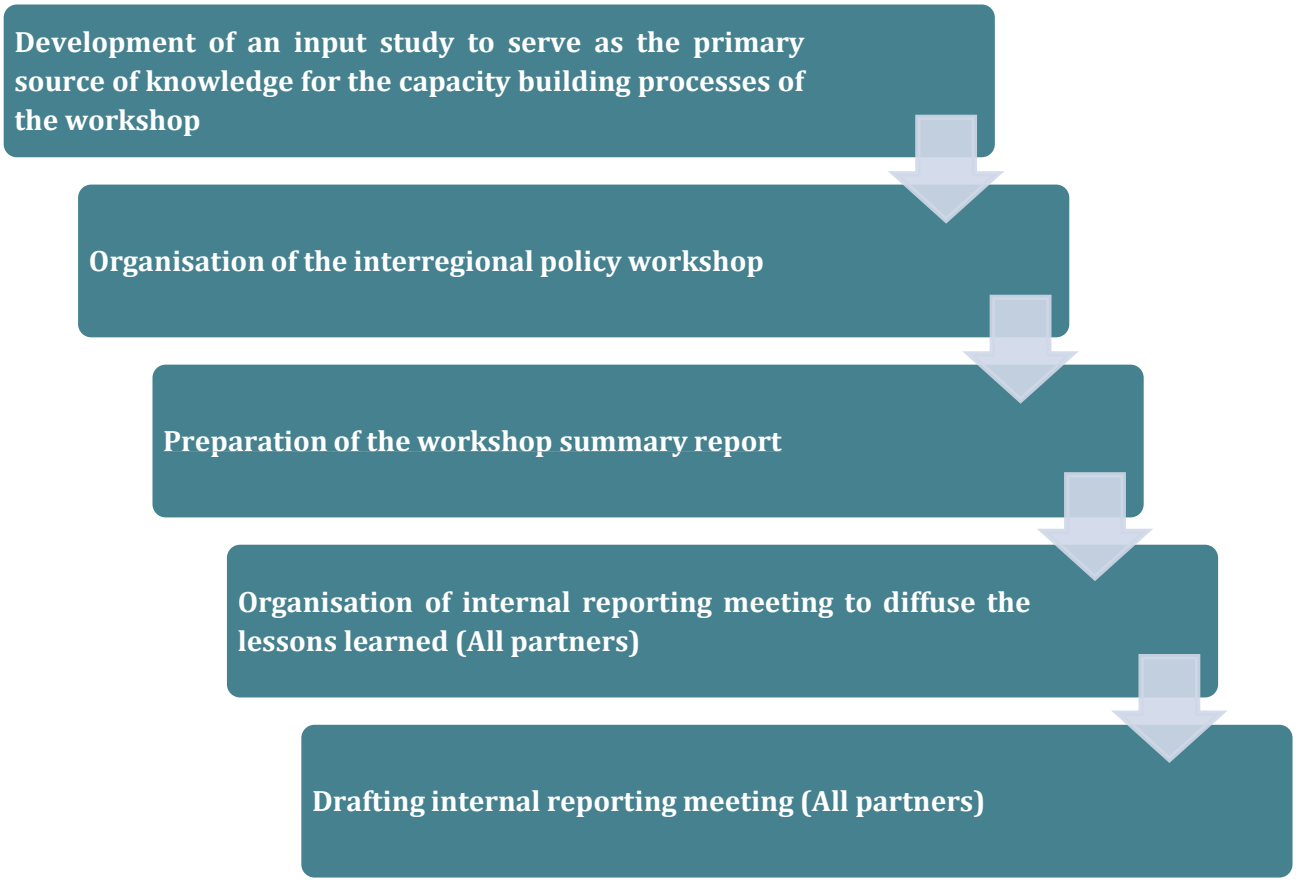
During interregional workshops, partners will have the opportunity to gain insight and understanding of the political priorities and initiatives in the field, identify challenges and needs to be addressed at the action plans implementation phase (project phase 2) as well as to ensure the involvement of key stakeholders in the facilitation of action plans.

The interactions and discussion to take place during interregional workshops will enable project partners to a) discuss about the economic and environmental challenges faced by rural economy SMEs, b) comment and elaborate on policy measures, designed to foster innovation adoption, b) examine the scalability and transferability of measures into other geographical contexts and sectors, and c) contribute to policy development, taking into account regional specificities.

The INNOGROW project includes the organisation of 3 interregional workshops to promote interregional learning and capacity building, addressing all the levels of policy learning required to bring substantial policy improvements for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural economy SMEs.

#	Title	Host	Country	Date
A3.1	Interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural SMEs	FLA	Italy	Semester 2
A3.2	Interregional workshop on supporting new business models for rural SMEs	PANOV	Hungary	Semester 5
A3.3	Interregional workshop on stimulating innovative products development	SZREDA	Bulgaria	Semester 3

The following diagram presents the structure of INNOGROW workshops.



4 Guidelines for the organisation of the 1st interregional workshop

4.1 Scope and objectives

The INNOGROW Activity A3.1 includes the organisation of an interregional thematic workshop for regional authorities' officials on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs. All partners will participate with members of their stakeholder groups and external experts to discuss regional strategies on how to establish and run innovation support centers, fostering interregional learning and capacity building.

During the workshop, regional authorities' representatives will have the opportunity to exchange views and ideas with their peers, familiarise themselves with policy measures and strategies implemented in other regions and co-shape a common approach for developing, organising and running successful innovation support centres that will provide practical information for new technologies, innovative processes and appropriate financial instruments.

Regional administrations will benefit from the experience acquired (lessons learned) during the implementation of relevant policy measures and initiatives (at both national and regional level), targeting to facilitate the development of innovation support centres and stimulate SMEs' involvement in innovative collaboration schemes.

The process of knowledge sharing and interaction is expected to have fruitful results for the participants, especially in the case where EU regions show very different levels of eco-innovation performance and SMEs' competitiveness.

Overall, the mission of the workshop is to facilitate the exchange of ideas and experiences, acquisition of knowledge and inspiration on how to steer policy implementation in developing innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs. The interregional workshop will pursue the following particular objectives:

1. Highlight the most relevant needs and challenges (associated with the adoption of innovation by rural economy SMEs) to be addressed through regional policies.
2. Inform regional authorities about the impact of innovation technologies on SMEs' competitiveness and productivity.

3. Gather experience form different regions and countries towards coordinated strategies in developing and running innovation support centres.
4. Bring together elected representatives of regional public administrations and members of stakeholders' groups, to enable them benefit from a structured interaction, revolving around a specific thematic area.

4.2 Date and venue

The interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs will be hosted by the Lombardy Foundation for the Environment (FLA) in the city of Lecco, Italy. The interregional thematic workshop will last two days (2-3 March 2017) and all project partners will participate, with members of their stakeholder groups and external experts. The working language of the workshop will be English, which means that participants must have a sufficient knowledge of the language to be able to fully participate in the hands-on activities.

Table 1: Interregional workshop details

INNOGROW - Interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs	
Thematic focus	Business and innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs
Host organisation	Lombardy Foundation for the Environment, FLA
Date	2-3 March 2017
Venue	Lecco Campus of Politecnino of MIlano Via G. Previati 1/c - Lecco
Language	English
Number of participants	20 – 35 participants
Type of participants	Regional authorities' officials, stakeholders, external experts
Format	Oral presentations, roundtable discussions, interactive exercises
Contact details	Mita Lapi E-mail: mita.lapi@flanet.org Telephone: +39 02 80616112

4.3 Participants

The INNOGROW Application Form (AF) foresees that 2 representatives from partners' organisations, accompanied by 1 regional stakeholder / external expert can participate in the first interregional thematic workshop, to be held in Milan, Italy.

ANNEX A provides a list of key regional stakeholders per project partner as they appear in the Application Form. This is only an indicative pool of regional stakeholders identified at an initial stage. Project partners are advised to send invitations to any other organisation or body, involved in the decision making process and/or interested in triggering policy and behavioural changes towards innovation-driven business development.

4.4 Type of session formats

There are a number of techniques from which the organisers of the interregional thematic workshops can choose to support the practical process of participants' participation in workshop activities. It is highly recommended that the format of the first policy workshop should include a) oral presentations, b) round table discussions (panels), and c) interactive exercises, in order to facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building.

Oral presentations are brief discussions of a defined topic delivered to a group of listeners in order to impart knowledge and stimulate debate. There are four different types of oral presentations: a) the informative presentations, seeking to convey information and promote understanding of an idea, b) the demonstrative presentations, showing the process of how to accomplish a task or activity (e.g. how to conduct a SWOT analysis), c) the persuasive presentations, which aim to influence a change in the belief, attitude, or behaviour, stimulating the uptake of actions, and d) the motivational or inspirational presentations that are designed to create an emotional connection between the topic and listeners; while encouraging the latter to go after their personal objectives. Oral presentations will provide an opportunity for gaining an overview of the existing policy measures towards innovation-driven business development.

Roundtable discussions constitute a flexible form of discussion employed at workshops and conferences to facilitate participants' interaction and exchange of ideas. A small number of participants is seated around a table to discuss in-depth a particular topic of interest (e.g. key challenges associated with the adoption of innovation by SMEs), seeking to resolve issues of disagreement; extract useful conclusions and decide upon future actions. Roundtables are considered an excellent format for providing and receiving targeted feedback, engaging in in-depth discussions, and meeting colleagues with similar interests. The roundtable discussion format allows participants to interact with each other, promoting networking and equal participation/contribution, triggering spontaneous conversations and allowing for faster decisions. Roundtable discussions typically contain 15 minutes of presentation, followed by 30 minutes of discussion and feedback.

Interactive exercises can be defined as a structured set of facilitated activities for groups of participants to stimulate creativity and knowledge sharing through collaborative working. The purpose of interactive exercises is to facilitate the demonstration and application of skills and techniques, which will enable participants to find new ideas regarding potential policy measures in support of innovation support centres. Interactive exercises are a perfect way to realise the cooperating stage of the consultation process, and to a lesser extent the empowering stage. Participants will have the opportunity to work together on a particular task (e.g. the development of action plans), identifying the barriers to achieving the best results for all participants, deciding priorities, strategy and vision, and working towards common solutions. Project partners and key regional stakeholders will explore procedures that encourage involvement and cooperation, promoting knowledge sharing and capacity building, leading to useful outcomes for participants with common needs in the field of entrepreneurship and SMEs competitiveness.

The structure of interactive exercises will be as follows:

Stage 1: Brainstorming	• Generate ideas amongst participants as regards the potential measures to be adopted to support the establishment/operation of an innovation support centre in own region.
Stage 2: Case study	• Have participants discuss a real case (e.g. South East BIC), seeking to draw lessons from actual implementation.
Stage 3: Action plan	• Ask participants to write down specific actions through which they will apply (at regional level) the key conclusions drawn from discussion.
Stage 4: Compare notes	• Have participants work in pairs or teams to compare their action plans and sharing what they thought was the most important aspects for achieving the best results.
Stage 5: Build consensus	• Encourage participants to formulate a common strategy for promoting the integration of innovative technologies in SMEs (through innovation support centres).

4.5 Agenda

"Interregional workshop on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs"

Lecco, Italy

2-3 March 2017

DAY 1: THURSDAY, 2 MARCH 2017

Time/ Duration	Description
09:30 – 10:00	*Arrivals and registration*
10:00 – 10:15	**Opening speech**
10:15 – 10:30	**Objectives of the workshop / Overview of the agenda**
10:30 – 12:30	**Topic 1*:**
	– Oral presentation of topic 1 (30 minutes) – Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes) – Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes) – Interactive session (roundtable discussion or interactive exercises): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes) – Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)
12:30 – 14:00	*Networking launch*
14:00 – 16:00	**Topic 2*:**
	– Oral presentation of topic 1 (30 minutes) – Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes) – Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes) – Interactive session (roundtable discussion or interactive exercises): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes) – Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)
16:00 – 16:30	*Coffee break*
16:30 – 17:30	**Discussion on project activities / Wrap - up**

DAY 2: FRIDAY, 3 MARCH 2017

Time/ Duration	Description
09:30 – 11:30	**Topic 3*:**
	– Oral presentation of topic 1 (30 minutes) – Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes) – Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes) – Interactive session (roundtable discussion or interactive exercises): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes) – Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)
11:30 – 12:00	*Coffee Break*
12:00 – 14:00	**Topic 4*:**
	– Oral presentation of topic 1 (30 minutes) – Questions of attendees on speaker's speech (10 minutes) – Answering the attendees' questions (10 minutes) – Interactive session (roundtable discussion or interactive exercises): Participants will be split into small groups to discuss specific topics or issues raised during the presentation (45 minutes) – Wrap up: The main conclusions and findings from the interactive session will be presented (25 minutes)
14:00 – 14:30	**Evaluation**
14:30 – 15:00	*Networking launch*

**** The topics to be discussed during the workshop are presented (in the form of recommendations) in section 6.3. The host organisation can choose more than one topics from each thematic area to present in the workshop.***

5 Thematic background

5.1 The challenge of innovation for SMEs

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are considered the backbone of Europe's economy as they represent 99% of all businesses across the EU. SMEs are responsible for 85% of new jobs (created the last five years) and for the two-thirds of the total private sector employment in the Union; while the European Commission considers them as the key to ensuring economic growth, innovation, job creation, and social integration in the EU.

Nevertheless, SMEs face challenges (regardless the nature of their business) that influence their operational efficiency and business growth, diminishing their potential to contribute effectively to sustainable regional development. These challenges may be internal to the business, for example, relating to managerial, organisational or communication procedures (e.g. human resources, infrastructure management, communication and marketing) and reflecting structural business components, or external challenges such as competition, legislation and networking/collaboration needs, reflecting the enabling environment and market structure.

One of the greatest challenges encountered by SMEs is associated with the adoption of innovation, which can lead to increases in productivity and access to new markets. Rural economy SMEs present low innovation performance (which can be further analysed as the introduction of new technologies and innovation business models or/and the participation in collaborative schemes) as well as low levels of interaction, cooperation and relationships between other firms or other local actors such as business support centres and knowledge institutes.

Rural innovation can be defined as the process of introducing/implementing new ideas, products and methods to deliver added value to regional markets, governments and society. Innovation may comprise new technologies, processes, products, markets, services, behaviours, and networks; while it can be R&D-based but also driven from within firms and communities (e.g. open innovation).

OECD defines four types of innovation: a) product innovation, which includes the development and market introduction of a new, redesigned or significantly improved product or service, b) process (technology) innovation referring to the implementation of a new technology or significantly

improved production/delivery method, c) marketing innovation, comprising the introduction of a new marketing method that bring significant changes in product placement, promotion or/and pricing, and d) organisational innovation defined as the adoption of a new organisational method in business practises, workplace structure and external relations.

The INNOGROW project makes explicit mention on the value of technological innovation to enhance the competitiveness of rural SMEs and contribute to the development of regional economies. Technological innovation refers to the process through which new or improved technologies (e.g. organic farming, functional food, crop resistance system, selective breeding) are developed and brought into widespread use to help SMEs reduce costs, adopt more efficient development processes and bring products to market more quickly than in the past.

According to the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT), every technology involves socio-technical innovation. The theory holds that there are four key constructs related to technology adoption: a) performance expectancy, b) effort expectancy, c) social influence, and d) facilitating conditions. The first three are direct determinants of technology usage intention, and the fourth is a direct determinant of technology use behaviour.

The adoption of technological innovation can be also affected by regulatory and institutional conditions, skills and knowledge to put it into practice; the internal organisation and structure of the company, and the operation of social learning between firms. What is more, the take up of innovation (in the form of new technologies) largely depends on the cooperation between knowledge institutes, public authorities and companies (triple helix cooperation) as well as the provision and effectiveness of advisory and technical assistance for SMEs.

5.2 The impact of innovative technologies on SMEs' competitiveness and productivity

INNOGROW A1.1 established a framework for analysing the impact of new disruptive technologies on SMEs' competitiveness and productivity, enabling project partners to evaluate and understand the implications of technology innovation on business operations and regional development.

Project partners managed to identify and gather relevant evidence and cases of new technologies adopted by rural economy SMEs in own region, leading to the development of an impact analysis report, presenting the results of innovative technologies in business operations and social welfare.

Research has indicated three broad categories of technologies that have the potential to enhance SMEs' competitiveness, boost productivity, and reduce ecological footprint.

A. **Innovative production technologies** (organic farming, renewable energy, precision agriculture, crop resistance systems, novel crop and functional foods)
B. **Technologies supporting products' distribution** (E-platforms for products' promotion, online orders and delivery tools, food traceability)
C. **Technologies supporting products' safety** (smart meters and Internet of Things, internal traceability systems, selective breeding and feeding processes).

These technologies, which are applicable in rural-specific activities (such as agriculture), include up-to-date devices, systems, sensors and machineries to modernise the production and distribution process, allowing for real-time traceability and diagnosis of crop state, as well as new marketing strategies (or business models) to access new markets and expand customer base.

The collection and analysis of cases/evidence on new technology adoption provided useful insights on the barriers hindering private sector's investment in innovation, the socio-economic and environmental impacts of certain types of innovative technologies, and the potential transferability and uptake of new technologies by rural SMEs in different regional contexts and sectors.

Evidence shows that the impact of new disruptive technologies lies in two major areas: i) economic growth and social welfare and ii) environmental protection and sustainable development. The socio-economic dimension refers to the potential economic, social and cultural impacts of a technology development/innovation on the lives and circumstances of people, their families and their communities, affecting business productivity, trade flows, income level, availability and quality of products, workforce educational attainment and health status. The environmental dimension includes effects on land, water, air or any other component of the environment (such as greenhouse gas emissions, resource efficiency, water quality and soil erosion), as well as on wildlife harvesting and heritage resources. The impact of each technology is illustrated in the following table.

#	Technology	Short description	Socio economic & environmental impact	Barriers to adoption
Innovative production technologies				
1	Organic farming	Farming system aiming at sustainability, enhancement of soil fertility and biological diversity while, avoiding synthetic pesticides, antibiotics, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, and growth hormones.	- Lower input use and costs - Higher resistance in disease, pest and drought, which results in improved productivity. - Higher prices and revenues as rural SME access the market of premium consumers - Increased exports to reach a larger number of premium consumers in other EU countries - Better energy efficiency compared to conventional farming - Less greenhouse gas emissions, which is found to be higher for mono-cropping than for multi-cropping - Less soil erosion, water conservation, and improved soil organic matter and biodiversity compared to conventional systems	- Weed control is frequently a problem in organic crops - Many farmers believe that mechanical weed control is usually less effective than chemical weed control under wet conditions - Limited financial resources - Organic farming is less economically viable without premium prices - Labour inputs are higher in organic farming systems
2	Renewable energy	Energy that is collected from resources which are naturally replenished, such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves, and geothermal heat.	- Significant cost savings derived from reduced energy costs. - Stable operating costs - Increased revenues for sustainable hotel businesses derived from eco-friendly travelers - Reduce environmental impact	- Unfavourable perception of competitiveness of renewable energy options compared to diesel power generation - Limited access to capital and cost of financing - Barriers related to the ownership status and the different interests - Lack of technical capabilities - Inadequate capacity building programs - Lack of incentives and clear policy instruments - Lack of dedicated institutional bodies such as coordinating agencies for renewable energy deployment

#	Technology	Short description	Socio economic & environmental impact	Barriers to adoption
3	Precision agriculture	Farming management system based on observing, measuring and responding to variability in crops, aiming to optimize returns on inputs, while preserving resources.	- Increased savings in pesticide use following the adoption of precision agriculture - Reduce uncertainty of crop yield - Improve management of fertilizer usage and other inputs - Better matching farming practices with the aid of precision technology - Improved or objectively documented animal welfare	- Limited availability of affordable automated identification systems - Limited high-speed and affordable internet access in rural areas - Privacy concerns related to data captured on-farm - Absence of clear cost-benefit data and returns of precision farming - Lack of a consistent consulting service for farmers - Compatibility issues
4	Crop resistance systems	Innovative crop protection mechanisms, such as integrated pest management systems, biological pest control techniques, plant of herbicide tolerant crops, minimising use of conventional pesticides.	- Reduced number of pests and of pesticide applications needed Improved efficiency of production - Cost savings associated with using less pesticides and improving production - Improved environmental safety and impact - Market benefits derived from the access of early adopters of IPM systems to specific markets segments characterized by strict environmental requirements - Health benefits, especially related to reduced incidents of allergies and asthma - An increase of labour costs has been reported due to superficial tillage and crop monitoring.	- Lack of experience with IPM across the EU member stated - Products grown using IPM principles is rarely labelled as such, and thus consumers have limited understanding of the approach and less willingness to pay premium prices. - Lack of training and advisory services regarding IPM systems
5	Novel crop	A range of unusual crops (oil crops, fibre crops, biomass crops) that can be grown for specific end markets, such as fibre production, dietary supplements, plastics, pharmaceutical and energy industries.	- New business opportunities in rural areas, providing additional diversity and innovation beyond agriculture - Production of innovative, higher value added products - Access to new markets	- Lack of knowledge and evidence on the impact of novel crops - Regulatory framework (thresholds specifications)

#	Technology	Short description	Socio economic & environmental impact	Barriers to adoption
6	Functional foods	A food given an additional function, usually related to health-promotion or disease prevention, by adding new ingredients or more of existing ingredients.	- Access to a fasting growing and innovative industry - Access to health conscious consumers willing to pay premium prices.	- High costs related to research, product approval and marketing of functional foods - Entry barriers created by large multinational functional food providers - Consumer skepticism about the purpose and benefits of functional foods - EU regulation on health claims
TECHNOLOGIES SUPPORTING PRODUCTS' DISTRIBUTION				
7	E-platforms for products' promotion	Online platforms used as contact points among local producers / SMEs and big importers in other EU countries, supporting the entire range of transaction	- Higher internationalization and market expansion for goods / services - Increased revenues: SMEs that use the Internet at high levels have revenue growth of up to 22 % higher than those that do not or use the Internet at low levels - Improved competitiveness: The cost of business transaction is lower than in traditional methods due to the nature of the Internet. - Improved administration and financial planning -	- Limited provision of affordably priced high-speed internet access - Lack of policy support and regional financial resources - Linguistic barriers - Costs of using online platform - Lack of payment facilities (such as credit cards) and of a secure payments system - Legal uncertainty
8	Online orders and delivery tools	Online systems allowing customers to place their orders remotely, track their orders, retain preferences, receive information about availability of products of their interest etc.	- Wider geographical reach achieved, when adopting ICT solutions for e-commerce - Higher speed in interactions between the participants of e-commerce - Lower costs of business transaction compared to traditional methods - The competitive advantage generated from an effective e-commerce strategy, over other SMEs in the industry that do not offer their products and services online -	- Lack of trust among consumers - Security issues for credit-card payments - Lack of payment facilities - Limited provision of affordably priced high-speed internet access - Lack of entrepreneurial skills within SMEs

#	Technology	Short description	Socio economic & environmental impact	Barriers to adoption
9	Food traceability as marketing tool	Online systems providing total transparency and maximum information to customers, enabling them to trace the route of businesses' products.	- Increased sales and revenues as a result of improved customers' trust. Traceability can be a buying criterion for consumers (due to their increased trust), and willingness to pay more, increasing businesses' sales, revenues and competitiveness in the sector. - Consumer demand for traceability is expressed directly at the cash register of SMEs operating mainly in the agricultural, agribusiness and pharmaceutical industries, though consumers' willingness to pay.	- Lack of information about traceability systems - Lack of information about traceability systems - Lack of enough knowledge to implement traceability, and lack of appropriate training of the involved staff, which can result in increased staff costs / man-hours
TECHNOLOGIES SUPPORTING PRODUCTS' SAFETY				
10	Smart meters and Internet of Things	Use of sensors, electronics, software, actuators, and network connectivity that provide insightful data regarding businesses operations through remote monitoring.	- Increased cost efficiency - Improved productivity and better quality of products - Improved energy efficiency, storage conditions, soil and crop health, animal behavior. - Availability of new solutions - Adherence to regulatory mandates concerning environmental impact and resource efficiency	- Lack of technical experience and skills - Resistance to change - Security issues - Lack of adequate information on the best and most suitable technology based on company's needs - Cost to setup and maintain new technological infrastructures - Lack of awareness among consumers
11	Internal products traceability systems and traceability as a supply chain management tool	Systems that allow tracking of any food, feed, food-producing animal or substance that will be used for consumption through all stages of production, processing and distribution.	- Improvement in food crisis management - Increase in customer satisfaction - Better quality of products in long run based on analysis of traceability information and laboratory test results - Improved agricultural sustainability - Improved access to markets by complying with required safety standards.	- Lack of financial resources - Standardisation / interoperability issues - Lack of technical skills - Lack of awareness - Privacy of personal and company's data - Lack of clear regulation - Problems instituting effective and independent monitoring and compliance systems

#	Technology	Short description	Socio economic & environmental impact	Barriers to adoption
12	Selective breeding and feeding processes	Process by which humans use animal breeding and plant breeding to selectively develop particular traits / characteristics by choosing which typically animal or plant males and females will sexually reproduce and have offspring together.	- Encouraging plant and animal characteristics that are more beneficial to farmers in terms of productivity. - Higher resistance of crops to pests and diseases. - Selective breeding can give plants the ability to grow on lands that are previously not suitable for farming. - Creation of high-quality products, increasing the market value of the products and the respective profit. - Reverse fertility loss through genome-wide selection traits	- Selective breeding of certain genes can reduce or remove other genes from the overall pool, a process which is irreversible. - The systematic underinvestment in expertise, science, technology and infrastructure by governments. - Selectively breeding plants are difficult to manage in a controlled environment or greenhouse setting.

5.3 Business development and innovation support services

The provision of business support services (in the form of advisory and technical assistance) is considered a key enabler for sustainable SMEs development, allowing companies to increase their competitiveness and capacity to access new markets by overcoming the abovementioned business challenges (section 5.1).

Business incubation is a process that contributes to the successful development/operation of fledgling SMEs by offering an array of targeted resources and services (such as mentoring, networking and skill transfer). Business incubation/support may be operational, addressing an enterprise's day-to-day operations, or strategic, addressing medium and long-term objectives related to the market access or competitiveness of a company.

Business support services are usually provided by non-governmental organisations, which are committed to provide mentoring, business training, advice and facilitation of linkages to SMEs and emerging entrepreneurs. Business Support Centres (BSCs) cover a wide range of non-financial services including: i) the delivery of training and human resource development services, ii) support for technology and product development, iii) the development of business linkages, iv) policy and advocacy support, v) marketing assistance (e.g. production of marketing and promotional materials), vi) the provision of infrastructure and market access services (e.g. access to expensive equipment) and vii) the provision of practical information on market opportunities and national legislation.

Furthermore, Business Support Centres seek to enhance SME's capacity to access finance by providing information on how to utilise tender, funding and investment opportunities (e.g. ERDF) and assisting them in effectively using financial resources (once they have been granted) in such a way to improve their productivity and competitiveness.

When it comes to innovation, SMEs need to identify sources of appropriate innovation knowledge, facilitation services and innovation brokering, to fully exploit their innovation potential. SMEs can find this kind of support through dedicated business instruments (i.e. business innovation centres), which are designed to support SMEs innovation activities and promote knowledge sharing.

The mission of innovation centres is to establish an enabling research, development and innovation environment for rural economy SMEs through the provision of a range of support services, with the aim to strengthen the innovation capacity of SMEs and create value on the market and society; thus underpinning the regional strategy for smart specialisation.

Business innovation support services focus mainly on co-operation, sharing of knowledge and intermediating advisory methods, including the provision of indirect support to SMEs in the form of business tailored services (e.g. innovation management, capacity building, IPR management, participation in tenders), networking and collaborative actions (e.g. innovative collaborative networks). In a nutshell, Business Innovation Centres (BICs) provide the following services and functions to SMEs:

- Dissemination/sharing of research findings and innovation knowledge.
- Delivery of training to enhance SMEs' capability to manage technology and innovation.
- Encouraging the participation in research projects and facilitating access to funding through European and national programmes.
- Enhancing the research and innovation capacities of SMEs by helping to create synergies with other research actors; fostering technological cooperation.
- Provision of practical information on market/tender opportunities and national legislation.
- Consulting on business planning, including the drafting of operational plans for all business activities including research, sales, marketing, and human resources.
- Fostering internationalisation, enabling SMEs to access new markets and extend their customer base.

5.4 Collection of innovation support centres for SMEs

South East BIC (Ireland)

South East BIC (www.southeastbic.ie), located in the city of Waterford (Ireland), is a public private partnership committed to support the generation and development of new innovative enterprises and assist existing rural SMEs to innovate and expand. The centre provides high quality specialised business consultancy and active incubation. The BIC team works closely in collaboration with other local, regional, national enterprise support agencies and has strong international connections, particularly in Europe, through its membership of the European BIC Network (EBN).

South East BIC aims to contribute to the creation of new knowledge intensive companies based on promising technology and capable innovative people. It provides SMEs with access to a range of business expertise and business development programmes to accelerate the route to market and reduce the risk. Its main activities include:

- Identification of the most appropriate funding methods for SMEs, providing guidance on how to develop a detailed business plan to access the most appropriate finance for business stage of development.
- Business planning, whether to critically assess an opportunity/idea, or to increase public or private funding. Creating the strategy requires a broad range of capabilities that revolve around the market opportunity, the business model and unique selling proposition to realise the competitive advantages of the business and its corporate structure and, not least, the people in the business who will govern, lead and manage it to success.
- General business advice and initial feedback on concepts, business plans, sales and marketing strategies, routes to market, and business models.

- Support to clients on feasibility studies to establish project viability. By providing independent and experienced feedback, the centre ensures that SMEs are assessing the market, verifying their idea and identifying the optimum routes to market.
- Business incubation, providing start-up companies with space and direct access to onsite qualified business consultants.
- Facilitating continuous skills and knowledge development through a full calendar of seminars, networking events, training programmes and information sessions (e.g. Workshop "Starting Your Innovative Business").

CEI Navarra (Spain)

The European Business Innovation Centre of Navarre (CEIN - www.cein.es) is a non-profit association established by the Government of Navarra with the aim to promote regional entrepreneurship and innovation, towards sustainable regional development. The mission of the centre is to diversify the industrial and economic area of Navarra region and contribute to its development by stimulating entrepreneurship, supporting the creation and consolidation of new businesses and promoting innovation in SMEs (through the introduction of new technologies and innovative business models).

The centre provides specialised business support services that help entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable, consolidated and innovative businesses. Established in 1988, CEIN provides a wide range of non-financial services including a) business incubation targeting to accelerate the start-up process of innovative and highly promising technology-based firms, b) the delivery of training in innovation and business change management, c) the dissemination of information and innovation knowledge, and d) the identification of new business opportunities, evaluating their potential and associated risks.

Additionally, CEIN introduced a dedicated programme to stimulate the creation of technology-based innovative enterprises. The EIBT programme aims to convert science, technology and advanced knowledge into new innovative SMEs that will deliver goods and services with a high added value through the utilisation of advanced technological processes. The particular objectives of the programme include: i) creating a favourable environment for the operation of technology-based SMEs, ii) providing access to top-level scientific and technological skills, enabling the initiation of business development projects, iii) offering access to a wide range of opportunities with regards to funding, governmental and private venture capital, and iv) creating synergies with other companies and research institutes to establish open innovation collaboration schemes.

BIC of Crete (Greece)

The Agricultural Business and Innovation Centre of Crete (www.bicofcrete.gr) is a non-profit organisation providing specialised business consulting services for innovation driven competitiveness and growth of agricultural SMEs. BIC's primary goal is to promote innovation in agricultural SMEs by supporting the integration of new or improved technologies into the production as well as the adoption of innovative business models. The organisation supports the establishment of new innovative companies (start ups) assuring their sustainable development through the delivery of a full spectrum of business support and innovation services, including:

- Consulting on business development
- Preparation of business plans and feasibility studies
- Transfer of technology and know-how concerning the integration of new technologies
- Providing access to finance and appropriate sources of funding
- Networking and identification of potential partners in Greece and abroad
- Development of marketing strategies for small agricultural businesses
- Organisation of information campaigns on new production and delivery methods

- Delivery of training to farmers and human resources development for SMEs seeking a more productive route through technological innovation.

Furthermore, the Centre engages with the implementation/management of national and EU wide projects related to innovative entrepreneurship. Through these projects, the Centre aims to contribute to the development of innovation-friendly business environments for rural SMEs, fostering the adoption of innovation patterns. BIC of Crete also acts as a link between businesses, municipalities, knowledge institutions and EU institutions in entrepreneurship, innovation and regional development.

BSC SMEs - Ruse (Bulgaria)

The Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Size Enterprises (http://bsc.smebg.net/en/) is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation established to support businesses in the Ruse administrative region. Its mission is to underpin and accelerate the development of cohesive and productive innovation ecosystems, paving the way for knowledge and innovation driven regional development.

To effectively accomplish this goal, the BSC team provides regional business community with a comprehensive portfolio of consultation and information services ranging from business strategy, market research and project management to information on joint venture opportunities, intellectual property as well as networking and marketing activities.

In terms of supporting R&D and innovation, the centre has created a database of 350 companies, which have used its services to support the integration of new technologies and ICT into business processes. Many of these companies regularly consult the expert networks at the centre and many partnerships have been formed between companies and foreign experts concerning production and

technology challenges, and quality management. Overall, Centre's innovation support services include:

- Performing SWOT analysis to identify business areas of weaknesses, strengths and opportunities.
- Supporting the integration of new technologies and intellectual property of the business.
- Assisting SMEs with developing the management teams, the people, skills and training requirements for managing and implementing innovation plans.
- Determining the level of innovation and providing access to finance through grants or other similar support.
- Providing leasing support for purchasing technological equipment.

What is more, BSC SME – Ruse established the first business incubator in Bulgaria as a pilot project, followed by the launch of two additional incubators – one funded by the Austrian Government and one virtual incubator where companies use start-up credit and/or the machine leasing system without using the physical premises.

BIC Minho (Portugal)

The Business Innovation Centre of Minho (http://bicminho.eu) is a non-profit organisation (certified by the European Union) that supports the development and growth of SMEs, innovative entrepreneurs and start ups across the Minho region. BICMINHO aims to create and develop innovative businesses, by offering a wide range of business support services within a professional cost-effective structure.

Established in 2001, BICMINHO seeks to promote regional economic and social development, and generating new jobs via innovation and business creation. This is achieved through the promotion and development of local business networks, and by helping entrepreneurs realise their innovative

business ideas, and by providing support services aimed to complete the existing SME modernization, innovation and internationalization processes.

The centre provides specialised business consulting services to SMEs in four key areas (entrepreneurship, innovation and SME modernisation, internationalization and new markets, training and HR management). BICMINHO is committed to unlock innovation in the business community, offering regional SMEs an integrated portfolio of business innovation support services, including: a) optimisation of production processes, b) strategic marketing and communication, c) access to European and national funding, d) certification processes (e.g. ISO, TQM), and e) training and innovation management.

The region of Minho has a long history in traditional industries such as agricultural and textile. BICMINHO contributes to revitalising agribusiness through a creative vision and by giving them added value at international level. BICMINHO has introduced the "Incentive Systems for Qualification and Internationalisation" programme to provide direct financial support to agricultural SMEs willing to reinforce their business capacity by integrating new technologies or/and applying innovative business models. This will help increase SMEs' flexibility to better meet the requirements of the international market, facilitating the marketing of agricultural products as well as enabling expanding into new markets.

BICMINHO has managed to convert many innovative business ideas into successful business projects, contributing to the sustainable development (creating jobs and wealth) of the Minho region. The Centre has helped to create more than 3,000 jobs and is currently home to 607 rural SMEs. In the years the BIC has been operating, the supported companies have generated a collective turnover of €648 million.

INNOVA BIC (Italy)

INNOVA BIC (www.innovabic.it) was founded in 1994, following the initiative of DG XVI (Directorate-General for Regional Policies and Cohesion), local institutions and businesses. INNOVA BIC is a public-private business support organisation, aimed to promote sustainable economic growth and employment for rural areas in the Province of Messina.

INNOVA's mission is to strengthen the region's innovation potential, intensify intra- and inter-regional linkages that include the region's innovative stakeholders, and accompany - through service provision - regional innovative actors' ideas and innovative concepts along their commercialisation process up to successful market entry and beyond. The organisation works closely with a diverse range of entities, such as academic institutes, research institutes, partner companies and start-ups, to create synergies for eco-innovation in rural specific activities such as agriculture and tourism.

INNOVA BIC offers a wide range of innovation management services, such as training and coaching, feasibility study preparation, contact mediation to financing providers, project management and event organisation to raise awareness on innovation related activities and new technologies. The centre supports also the regional administration in the creation and management of innovative projects as well as strategic planning of innovation activities, focused on the agricultural and tourism sector. Furthermore, INNOVA BIC communicates new tender possibilities, builds linkages among SMEs and participates itself in European projects (e.g. H2Lab, OPEN), targeting to foster regional innovation.

Over the past 22 years, INNOVA BIC has built up an impressive track record of innovation services delivery, making a tangible contribution to regional economy by: a) providing non-financial support to more than 200 companies (incl. innovation management, new product development, access to new markets, introduction of new technologies in production, and new business models), b)

mobilising investments of about €300 million towards sustainable modes of production, and c) providing more than 15,000 hours of training in innovative technologies to rural SMEs.

Finally, INNOVA BIC is a member of the European BIC Network (EBN), which is an EU-supported network of over 250 European Business Innovation Centres (BICs) that are involved in the selection and support of innovative enterprises with high growth potential.

Innovate-NI (United Kingdom)

Innovate-NI (www.innovate-ni.com), Northern Ireland's latest innovation support vehicle for high-growth SMEs, brings over 40 years' experience in helping SMEs develop and grow. Innovate-NI is the successor organisation to the Northern Ireland Business and Innovation Centre (NORIBIC), which has been the largest provider of business mentoring support in Northern Ireland for more than 35 years. Innovate-NI has been established to provide a dynamic and supportive incubation/business environment to accelerate the growth of ambitious innovative firms in the region of Derry.

Innovate-NI provides tailored business services to prospective entrepreneurs, micro-businesses and SMEs with the potential for growth, export and wealth creation in the knowledge-based sector. Centre's mission is to support the establishment, development and growth of technology-based, and/or export oriented businesses in Northern Ireland through the promotion, development and delivery of innovation in all functions of the business process.

Innovate-NI's extensive portfolio of services and activities are designed to help businesses unlock SMEs innovative potential and can be categorised as follows: a) Innovation Support Services, b) Incubation Support, c) Creative Industries Support, d) Business Growth Support, and e) Online Collaboration Tools. What is more, NORIBIC has been instrumental in bringing a wide range of

partners, from education to not-for profit to private sector, together to successfully deliver innovation support programmes and services.

Innovation support services include: i) discovering innovative ideas and connecting potential partners with complementary knowledge, competences and infrastructure to put ideas into practice; ii) identifying appropriate sources of funding; iii) protecting and exploiting intellectual property rights; and iv) identifying commercial opportunities at the European level. Furthermore, Innovate-NI delivers training services via a combination of leadership and (innovation) management training courses, seminars and workshops on topics relevant to innovation adoption and growing businesses.

Since 1986, NORIBIC's business consultants have shared their first hand experience, considerable knowledge, and resources to foster regional development through the diffusion of innovation. NORIBIC's main achievements include:

- Creation of over 200 new companies and innovation support to more than 2000 SMEs.
- Delivery of Northern Irelands' Innovating Regional Programme; a £2.6m portfolio of innovation support programmes, delivering business consulting services to more than 650 SMEs.
- Providing over 13000 hours of mentoring/coaching to over 850 SMEs across Northern Ireland during the last three years.
- Hosting a series of national and international conferences on innovation and entrepreneurship, attracting visitors/delegates from more than 30 EU countries.

BIC Plzen (Czech Republic)

Business Innovation Centre Plzen (http://en.bic.cz/) was established by the City of Plzen (Pilsen) in 1992 to support the development of business innovation in the region. The centre acts in the framework of the international networks supporting business and innovation and works in partnership with numerous organisations at regional, national and international level.

BIC Plzen supports the quality and intensity of the innovation and technology transfer to the economic practice in the Plzen region, with emphasis on new or enhanced technologies that could be applied in agriculture and industry (largest economic sectors in region); fostering regional development. Activities and services of the centre are provided for start-ups as well as for existing businesses with innovation and technological potential.

BIC Plzen's services are aimed primarily at SMEs and include, for example, support for the establishment of new innovative companies; help with seeking and obtaining funding for development projects; support for introducing innovations in companies and finding suitable partners for development, production and commercial collaborations. More precisely, BIC Plzen's activities are focused on the following areas:

- Preparation of business plans for SMEs, start-up companies and development projects, including external assessment of business plans' feasibility.
- Support for the involvement of innovative companies and research organisations in European R&D projects (e.g. Horizon 2020, EUREKA).
- Mediating communications between companies and academia and promoting commercialisation of R&D results.
- Identification of suitable funding sources for new technology acquisitions or intellectual property protection.
- Access to finance through preferential loans for investment in technology and premises, arranged by the Czech–Moravian Guarantee and Development Bank

- Provision of business innovation premises and protection of intellectual and industrial property.
- Promoting international business co-operation, seeking to identify partners for commercial and production collaborations in the EU countries
- Organisation of seminars, workshops and training events to stimulate the creation of innovation culture.

Up to now, BIC Plzen has supported over 70 companies through the provision of non-financial business services and contributed to the creation of more than 350 highly qualified jobs; while approximately 700 individuals has participated in the seminars and networking events, organised by the centre during the last 5 years.

BIC Bratislava (Slovakia)

The Business and Innovation Centre – BIC Bratislava (www.bic.sk) is a non-profit organisation, designed to promote the diffusion of innovation among Slovakian SMEs. Established in 1991, BIC Bratislava helps to turn innovative ideas into viable products and create new business opportunities towards sustainable development. The centre offers a wide range of practical business services and innovation resources to support SMEs with their business idea, innovation or enterprise through all the stages of commercialisation.

BIC Bratislava advises companies on business planning and development; supports innovation management and technology transfer; provides market incubation space; and creates platforms for entrepreneurs to develop their skills and networks. The centre aims to contribute to the survival rate of start-ups, by providing them with the best possible chance of growing and bringing products/services to the market.

BIC's main activities include:

- Technology and innovation management consulting.
- Supporting SMEs to gain access to the EU markets, through its connections with the European Business and Innovation Centres (EBN) and Enterprise Europe Network.
- Creation of a venture capital fund for technology based companies in Slovakia
- Disseminating information and raising awareness regarding innovation-related policies, legislation and support programmes.
- Stimulating the capacity of firms to innovate and facilitating linkage to other innovation services including intellectual property related services
- Commercialisation of research and technology development results
- Consulting in legal and intellectual property rights issues (e.g. preparation of technology transfer agreements).

Additionally, BIC Bratislava has been engaged with the development/elaboration of regional innovation strategies, including the 2004 Regional Innovation Strategy for the Bratislava Region and the 2013 Strategy for Development of Regional Research and Innovation Base of the Bratislava Region in period 2014-2020. The centre has also extensive experience in EU projects, having participated in several FP7 projects (e.g. QualityMeat, DETECT-it, ETINNE), focused on promoting innovation driven rural development. BIC Bratislava is currently involved in the implementation of the DANUBE-INCO project (INTERREG 2014-2016), which aims to develop cooperation networks for business innovation across the Danube Region.

Uppsala Innovation Centre (Sweden)

Uppsala Innovation Centre (UIC - http://uic.se/en) is a business incubator, offering well-defined processes to help start-up companies develop their innovations. Its mission is to increase the number of successful high-growth companies within the Uppsala region, thus contributing to sustainable regional development.

Uppsala Innovation Centre (UIC) is one of Sweden's leading business incubators and has been ranked the world's 10th – and Europe's 5th – best business incubator with a university connection by UBI Global 2015. UIC supports companies, entrepreneurs, scientists and innovators in their efforts to commercialise their ideas. Nine out of ten UIC alumni companies remain active in the market today. UIC offers business development support, knowledge and tools for innovative projects and growth companies, seeking to advance, scale-up and reach an international market.

The centre provides SMEs with a compendium of business support and innovation management services ranging from business/financial planning, guidance on fundraising and product commercialisation to the delivery of training, access to commercial and technology networks, and marketing activities.

The UIC model includes five business development programs and 70 carefully selected business coaches from the commercial sector, all focused on assisting companies in achieving their stated strategic objectives (i.e. business growth). Furthermore, UIC has a network of about 20 field experts, industrialisation coaches, and specialists experienced in turning innovative ideas into viable products, moving from prototype to series production.

Uppsala Innovation Centre's impact can be summarised as follows:

- The value of investments in UIC companies equalled €57 million during 2015. Of this amount, €42.6 million were venture capital and €14.4 million contributions and loans. Since 2004, more than €2 billion have been invested in UIC companies.

- Turnover during 2015 for the growth companies within Uppsala Innovation Centre was €41.4 million; while more than 550 people were engaged in companies supported by UIC.
- Uppsala Innovation Centre's public return on investment (ROI) was 11 in 2015; which means that the public funding UIC received during 2015 was re-gained 11-fold through the taxes the incubator companies paid back to society.

6 Topics to be discussed in the workshop

6.1 Topic selection criteria

The following criteria will be taken into consideration for choosing the most suitable, up-to-date and relevant topics to be presented during the INNOGROW interregional thematic workshop on innovation support centres for rural economy SMEs.

1. Consistency with INNOGROW strategic objectives, goals and general scope

2. Compliance with EU, national and regional policy priorities in the field of innovation and SMEs' competitiveness

3. Responsiveness to the needs, challenges for regional authorities

4. Practical utility of topics so that consultation process will mobilise regional authorities' representatives to support the integration of key conclusions into regional policies

5. Trends and developments in the field of (information) technology and business innovation

6. Avoid overlap with relevant past events and activities about innovation-driven regional development, as well as with subsequent project interregional activities

6.2 Past events and activities

This section examines a series of relevant past events with the aim to identify what kind of topics/issues has already been discussed in workshops, conferences and seminars across the EU. This will enable to determine the strategic focus and structure of the 1st INNOGROW interregional workshop, avoiding the repetition of information.

Event 1: Workshop on Advisory Support for SME Access to Finance

Type of event:	Workshop
Date:	12-13 September 2016
Place:	Brussels (BE)
Thematic focus:	The workshop discussed the need to further develop support and advisory capacities to help SMEs identify, understand and access alternative forms of finance. Sessions were focused on a) the need to raise SMEs' awareness and understanding of alternative finance, b) existing national legislative initiatives to help SMEs gain access to finance, c) the role of information and advisory online platforms on SME access to finance, and d) intermediating platforms connecting SMEs to investors and alternative lenders
Participants:	Representatives of business and finance associations, development banks and agencies, policy-makers, entrepreneurs.
Format:	Oral presentations, round table discussions
Link:	http://ec.europa.eu/finance/events/2016/0912-workshop-advisory-support-sme/index_en.htm

Event 2: 2016 Creating a Smart Europe

Type of event:	Conference
Date:	22-24 June 2016
Place:	Amsterdam (NL)
Thematic focus:	Networking event in the field of new production technologies, materials, nanotechnology, biotechnology and digitalisation. The conference brings together research, industry, education, and policy from manufacturing, process industry and technology domains from all over Europe to identify priorities that are crucial to strengthen the European industrial innovation ecosystem.
Participants:	Field experts, researchers, academics, policy makers, entrepreneurs
Format:	Keynote lectures, case studies, site visits, interactive sessions
Link:	https://www.industrialtechnologies2016.eu/

Event 3: The 9th International Conference for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Regional Development

Type of event:	Conference
Date:	23-24 June 2016
Place:	Bucharest (RO)
Thematic focus:	Participants discussed the perspectives of responsible development of small and medium-sized enterprises in a dynamic environment. Sessions focused on the following topics: a) challenges and trends in contemporary entrepreneurship, b) strategic management for SMEs in a changing environment, c) business ethics - practices, boundaries and outcomes, and d) social entrepreneurship
Participants:	Academics, researchers, entrepreneurs, policy makers, students
Format:	Keynote speeches, oral presentations, workshops
Link:	http://iceird2016.com/

Event 4: Delivering better SME and Enterprise Support through EU Programmes and Policies

Type of event:	Seminar
Date:	11-12 July 2013
Place:	Brussels (BE)
Thematic focus:	The seminar focused on the different aspects of SME and enterprise development, aiming to provide participants with clear practical tools for SME support such as: how to fit with state aid rules, how can administrations and intermediaries make use of EU programmes such as the forthcoming HORIZON 2020 programme, the COSME programme, or the Structural Funds 2014-2020; and how can they best develop complex projects for SME support in fields such as financial instruments or international cooperation.
Participants:	SMEs representatives, policy makers in public administrations, regional authorities, Regional Development Agencies, as well as Chambers of Commerce
Format:	Oral presentations, panel discussions, workshops, question-and-answer sessions
Link:	https://www.espon.eu/main/Menu_Events/Menu_ESPONatEvents/

Event 5: IP & Innovation for SMEs and start-ups

Type of event:	Seminar
Date:	27 February 2013
Place:	Athens (GR)
Thematic focus:	The seminar aimed at highlighting the importance of intellectual assets

	protection and exploitation by SMEs and especially start-ups, with particular attention on patents. During the seminar, the following topics were presented: a) Intellectual Property Awareness and Enforcement: Innovative Services for the Mediterranean SMEs, b) Innovative intellectual property services provision to SMEs & start ups, and c) Protection & Exploitation of research results: Cooperation between firms and research & technology organizations
Participants:	Field experts, researchers, SMEs representatives, entrepreneurs
Format:	Keynote lectures, presentations, open discussion
Link:	http://www.kinno.eu/en/news-events/news/139-athens,-seminar-ip-innovation-for-smes-start-ups

Event 6: Entrepreneurship Workshop for SMEs of agricultural and fisheries sector

Type of event:	Workshop
Date:	8 April 2016
Place:	Malaga (ES)
Thematic focus:	The purpose of the workshop was to support the capacity of rural SMEs to engage in growth and innovation, introducing new modes of sustainable development towards internationalisation. Sessions were focused on: a) the importance of business planning for SMEs in agricultural and fishery sector, b) how a certified product can ease the entry into new markets, fostering internationalisation, c) highlighting the value of cost management for agricultural SMEs, and d) presenting new types of entrepreneurship in the Axarquia area.
Participants:	Representatives from rural SMEs, sectoral associations, public authorities, research and education institutions.
Format:	Keynote speeches, oral presentations, open discussion
Link:	https://www.trafoon.org/page/887

Event 7: Key opportunities for innovative SMEs

Type of event:	Workshop
Date:	11 February 2016
Place:	Brussels (BE)
Thematic focus:	European supporting schemes, particularly relevant for innovative SMEs in all sectors and themes.
Participants:	SMEs
Format:	Oral presentations, key-notes lectures, interactive sessions
Link:	https://www.eurostars-eureka.eu/content/key-opportunities-innovative-smes-workshop

Event 8: The SME INITIATIVE workshop

Type of event:	Workshop
Date:	23 April 2015
Place:	Brussels (BE)
Thematic focus:	The purpose of this workshop was to present and explain the steps needed to set up the SME Initiative in practice on the basis of the examples of Spain and Malta. The Spanish and Maltese authorities shared their experience with other countries. Presentations from the EIB, EIF and the Commission Services involved in the SME Initiative complemented the Spanish and Maltese presentations. Two interactive sessions provided lessons learned and clarifications on all organisational and technical issues.
Participants:	National authorities, policy makers, field experts
Format:	Keynote speeches, oral presentations, question and answer (Q&A) sessions
Link:	http://cor.europa.eu/en/events/Pages/sme-initiative.aspx

Event 9: Access to Finance for Research, Innovation and SMEs (2015)

Type of event:	Conference
Date:	15-17 June 2017
Place:	Riga (LV)
Thematic focus:	The conference focused on a) providing political answers to the macroeconomic situation; b) presenting ways to boost growth, jobs and competitiveness through innovation, including the Investment Plan for the EU; and c) demonstrating how the financial instruments, facilities and accompanying measures launched under Horizon 2020 can enhance access to finance for research, innovation and SMEs.
Participants:	Policy-makers, entrepreneurs, industry representatives
Format:	Key-notes lectures and oral presentations
Link:	http://www.innoweek2015.eu/conference

Conclusions on relevant events

Improving competitiveness of SMEs is at the forefront of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. As a result, there is a great interest in strengthening efforts to support SMEs in their capacity to promote sustainable regional development; which is demonstrated (among others) by the organisation of a large number of thematically relevant events.

The workshops and conferences identified address a great range of topics related to SMEs' competitiveness; ranging from the introduction of new production technologies and business models towards internationalisation to the enhancement of R&D activities and protection of intellectual properties.

The majority of them focused on increasing SMEs' awareness on existing funding opportunities, demonstrating how the EU financial instruments (e.g. Horizon 2020, COSME) and national initiatives can improve the financial environment for small businesses and start-ups; facilitating access to alternative sources of funding.

None of the aforementioned events highlighted the role of business innovation centres in promoting innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs, laying the emphasis on the provision of business advisory services (to stimulate the integration of new disruptive technologies across the supply and value chain) as a means to boost productivity and reduce negative environmental impact.

This creates the opportunity/need for the organisation of an interregional workshop that will deal with: a) the business challenges associated with the adoption of innovative technologies among rural SMEs, b) the impact of technological innovation on SMEs' competitiveness and productivity, and c) the provision of business and innovation support services to overcome the barriers hindering sustainable business growth.

6.3 Suggested topics to choose from

This section provides a very first suggestion on the topics to be presented and discussed during the 1st INNOGROW interregional thematic workshop, based on a) the research conducted for the collection of cases of established innovation support centres in EU countries and b) the results of Activity A1.1; exploring the impact of innovative technologies on SMEs' competitiveness. This list is not final and is subject to changes or updates (if necessary), following the review and feedback from the host organisation (FLA).

The term 'thematic areas' refers to a broad theme and the term 'topics' refers to the sub-themes in which the core theme is divided. Three distinct thematic areas have been identified for the 1st workshop. Each thematic area is divided into a number of topics, around which the presentations and discussions of the workshops will revolve. Guest speakers are expected to build upon the findings of the research conducted for the input paper by extending the scope of analysis and providing new perspectives for the topics under examination.

Thematic area A: The challenge of innovation for rural SMEs

The opening session will make explicit mention on the value of innovation as a key driver for sustainable rural development. This session will provide valuable insights into how the adoption of innovation (in the form of new or improved technologies) can lead to increases in productivity, enhancing SMEs' competiveness and access to new markets. Representatives from SMEs (members of stakeholder groups) will be encouraged to participate in the discussion, presenting their experience from the integration of innovative technologies into business processes (e.g. production, quality control, distribution) and discussing about the problems encountered. The purpose of this session is to highlight the challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption of technological innovation by SMEs in rural areas, demonstrating the most relevant needs to be addressed through regional policies.

<u>Indicative topics to be discussed:</u>

1. EU research and innovation for rural development: Major needs from the agro-food industry
2. Open innovation as a driver for improving the competitiveness of SMEs
3. Factors that influence rural economy SMEs to adopt innovation

Thematic Area B: New disruptive technologies for rural economy SMEs

This session will present an overview of selected new technologies (applicable in rural specific activities), which can be employed by rural economy SMEs to capture value from technological innovation and economies of scale, leading to increased competitiveness and productivity. Building upon the findings of INNOGROW Activity A1.1, this session will present the economic, socio-economic and environmental impacts that can be derived from the adoption of new or improved technologies such as innovative production technologies, technologies supporting products' distribution, technologies supporting product's safety. What is more, the barriers hindering the adoption of selected new technologies will be presented, updating regional authorities about the needs and challenges encountered by SMEs (e.g. regulatory conditions, skills, financial resources, lack of information and business/innovation support); and paving the way for relevant initiatives and policy measures.

Indicative topics to be discussed:

1. Categories of new technologies for rural economy SMEs
2. Impact of innovative technologies on SMEs' competitiveness and productivity
3. Barriers hindering the adoption of innovative technologies

Thematic Area C: Business development and innovation support services

This thematic session is expected to provide practical insights into how (business) innovation support centres can establish a coherent and enabling environment for SMEs, to fully exploit their innovation potential. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss about the type of business support services provided by innovation centres in their efforts to support SMEs' activities/operations and promote innovation knowledge sharing. This session will also present best practices from successful business innovation centres across the EU (e.g. South East BIC, Uppsala Innovation Centre). An open discussion will follow in which participants will share their own experiences from actual implementation. The exchange of views among the representatives of regional authorities will enable to reach a common approach on how to develop, organise and operate successful innovative support centres, contributing to sustainable rural development.

Indicative topics to be discussed:

1. The role of Business Innovation Centres (BICs) in supporting the sustainable development of rural economy SMEs
2. European success stories: Practical examples from successful innovation support centres across the EU
3. Sharing experiences in supporting the establishment of innovative support centres and networks to foster sustainable rural development.

7 Preparing the summary report

The final stage of the conduction of the 1st interregional thematic workshop includes the preparation of a summary report by the hosting partner. The summary report is considered the key output of activity A3.1 (a). This document will present the final outcomes of the workshop and will be used by project partners as the main input for diffusing the lessons learned within their organisations.

Summary reports are short written communication documents, which aim to convey information related to the discussions and activities carried out during workshop activities. The summary report should include the following aspects:

- Document the interventions of participants and the overall discussion within each session of the interregional thematic workshop.
- Draw conclusions from debate and interactive exercises in each session of the workshop.
- Briefly present policy recommendations for the development of action plans based on the interventions of the participants and the conclusions drawn from the discussion.
- Present an evaluation of the workshop based on the comments and feedback from participants (evaluation questionnaire).
- Present the metrics of the workshop (number of registered participants, number of completed evaluation questionnaires, and number of participants from each category of the target groups).

The following guidelines have been developed to provide assistance and guidance to the host organisation (FLA) on how to summarise and present the main conclusions drawn from the workshop (in the format of a summary paper), in order to facilitate the integration of key policy recommendations into regional action plans. In particular, the summary report should be drafted as follows:

Step 1: Develop short summaries for each session of the workshop. The summaries should include a) the context and objectives of the session, b) the main points from oral presentations/keynote speeches, c) key argumentation from the interventions of participants, and d) conclusions and findings extracted from the overall discussion and interactive exercises.

Step 2: Review the evaluation forms (if available). The author should summarise the key itches and ideas (as drawn from the forms completed by workshop participants), with regards to the themes / topics of the workshop. It is highly recommended that any idea (i.e. policy advice) that could contribute to the improvement of regional policies in the field (i.e. establishment of innovation support services for rural economy SMEs) should be integrated into regional action plans.

Step 3: Present the main conclusions with regards to the following themes:

- Evaluating the impact of innovative technologies on SMEs competitiveness and productivity.
- Recognising the challenges/barriers hindering the adoption of new, disruptive technologies by rural SMEs.
- Identifying the services provided by business & innovation support centres to help rural economy SMEs turn innovative ideas into viable products and create new business opportunities.
- Planning a common strategy to support the establishment of innovation support centres and networks towards sustainable rural development.

Step 4: Juxtapose the key arguments / conclusions drawn from the workshop with any relevant results and findings from INNOGROW thematic studies and guides on similar policy aspects. Identify convergences and divergences between findings.

Step 5: Provide guidelines (in the form of policy recommendations) on how to utilise the key conclusions drawn to design policy measures and action plans to promote innovation driven competitiveness and growth of rural SMEs. The guidelines on how to integrate the lessons learnt in the INNOGROW action plans should be described in a way that is simple, brief, and easy to follow.

Step 6: Draft the summary report. The workshop summary report should be drafted in a clear and concise way, focusing on the conclusions drawn from knowledge sharing and consultation processes that took place during the workshop sessions.

Indicatively, the workshop summary report can have the **following structure**:

1. Introduction
2. Background and objectives of the workshop
3. Summary of sessions
4. Key discussion points
5. Main conclusions
6. Juxtaposition with key findings from project activities
7. Policy recommendations

ANNEX A: Agenda

ANNEX B: Participants list

8 Bibliography

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9 ANNEX A: Regional stakeholders per project partner

PARTNER	COUNTRY	KEY REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
RoT		- Ministry of Economy, Infrastructure, Maritime Affairs and Tourism - Regional Association of Municipalities of Thessaly - University of Thessaly, Department of Regional Development - University of Applied Sciences of Thessaly - Association of Thessalian Enterprises and Industries - Technical Chamber of Central and Western Greece
FLA		- Lombardy Region - Sondrio Province - ISPRA Institute - ERSAF – Regional Agency for Agricultural and Forest Services - Politecnico di Milano - Università degli Studi di Milano - Università degli Studi di Milano Bicocca - Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore - CRASL – Centro di Ricerca sull'Ambiente, l'energia e lo sviluppo sostenibile - CNR, JRC, ARPA - Milan Chamber of Commerce - A.R.I.B.L - AIEL – The Italian Agroenergy Association
ZPR		- Ministry of Economics of the Republic of Latvia - Latvia University of Agriculture - Union Farmers Parliament - Rural consulting and education centre of Latvia - Rural support service
SZREDA		- Ministry of Economy Economic - Promotion Policies Directorate - Stara Zagora Regional Administration - Municipality of Stara Zagora - Municipality of Kazanlak - Municipality of Gurkovo - Municipality of Nikolaevo - Municipality of Gurkovo - Municipality of Opan - Municipality of Radnevo - Municipality of Bratya Daskalovi - Faculty of Economics, Trakia University - Faculty of Agriculture, Trakia University - Chamber of commerce and industry – Stara Zagora - Bulagro Group Holding Agroconsult Ltd. - First Investment Bank - United Bulgarian Bank - Somoni Financial Group

PARTNER	COUNTRY	KEY REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS
RRAPK		- Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic - Pardubice Region - University Pardubice - Regional Chamber of Commerce of the Pardubice Region - Agrarian Chamber of the Pardubice Region - Energy Technical - Innovation Cluster
CoC-Molise		- Molise region - Unioncamere - Università degli Studi del Molise - Sviluppo Italia Molise - Finmolise - 360° Olive Cluster, Compagnia del Molise Cluster - Pignatelli Oil, Valerio Wines, Di Nucci Dairy, Cheese factory, Le IFE Truffle
BSC Kranj		- Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, Directorate for Entrepreneurship, Competitiveness and Technology - Slovenian Centre for Competitiveness and Innovation (SCCI) - The Slovenian Rural Network, national support unit (NSU) - Competence Center for Biotechnological Development and Innovation (CCBDI) - Biotechnical centre Naklo - Intercompany education and training centre (MIC) - Centre for Sustainable Rural Development Kranj - Initiative Start:up Slovenia - Agro Biznis - Agro Gorenjska - Datalab - The Slovene Enterprise Fund - The Slovenian Regional Development fund - SID Bank Inc.
PANOV		- Ministry for National Economy / Deputy State Secretariat - of Economic Development Programmes - The National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NRDI Office) - Local Government of County Vas, and Győr MosonSopron - University of West Hungary, - Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences - University of Pannonia Georgikon Faculty - Pannon Novum Regional Innovation Agency - Chamber of Commerce and Industry of County - Chamber of Commerce and Industry of County Vas - Zala County Foundation for Enterprise Promotion