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Dear reader,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Newsletter series of the INNOGROW project that promotes the adoption of innovation by rural economy SMEs, through sharing practices and experiences between regions and actors relevant to rural economy SMEs competitiveness, and integrating lessons learnt into regional policies and action plans.

During the last period of implementation all activities contributing to the exchange of experience and the communication of project results are progressing significantly. Partners have advanced with the development of an innovative online benchmarking tool to support INNOGROW regions in assessing their performance on improving rural economy SMEs competitiveness. The first study visit to transfer experiences on innovative production policies has been held in Mantua, Italy, with the participation of 30 representatives from Greece, Italy, Latvia, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia. Moreover, partners to the INNOGROW project are planning the next interregional workshop in Budapest, on new business models for rural economy SMEs and the upcoming study visit in the region of Thessaly.

In this newsletter, you will find information about past, current and future project activities, key project results and upcoming events, as well as interesting conclusions drawn from the study visit in Mantua and the regional stakeholder meetings. Through our project website and this periodic newsletter, we will keep you informed about our progress and key outcomes.

The INNOGROW project team!

DO YOU WANT TO BE PART OF IT AND KNOW OF IT?

Subscribe to our newsletter through the website <https://www.interregeurope.eu/innogrow/>

or contact the Project Coordinator: s.papadimopoulou@thessaly.gov.gr

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PROJECT AT A GLANCE

INNOGROW is a European project funded by INTERREG Europe Programme that aims to support the modernisation of existing rural economy SMEs and the proliferation of innovative start-ups through policies that promote the adoption of technology and business model innovation by SMEs in rural areas.



Benchmarking regions' performance on supporting innovation for rural economy SMEs

Newcastle University has developed, in the context of the INNOGROW project, an innovative online benchmarking tool to support INNOGROW regions in assessing their performance on improving rural economy SMEs competitiveness. The benchmarking tool <https://www.staff.ncl.ac.uk/steven.hall/innogrow/> will help policy makers and stakeholders to identify the most suitable practices to improve rural SMEs competitiveness.

To create the tool, Newcastle University has prepared suitable indicators and defined areas to benchmark, to evaluate the existing policy approaches of regions. The key indicators were defined using two main data resources: the entrepreneurial performance measures of the Eurostat-OECD entrepreneurship programme (EIP) and the global competitiveness index from the World Economic Forum (WEF). The online benchmarking tool created is a web-based interface, utilising the existing datasets from these main two sources, designed as a user-driven data tool so that users can select specific indicators, areas or countries that they would like to compare.

The tool, which is still an experimental prototype, will consequently allow users to enter data online with a simple and friendly template. Currently the

data used only provide information at the national level. Next, users are encouraged to upload regional data or case studies. This will be useful for policy makers and stakeholders to identify the suitable practices and policies to support rural SMEs at both national and regional level.

The first pilot of this benchmarking tool has been launched. All partners will test it online, promote it to be tested by regional authorities beyond the partnership and report to Newcastle University on needed improvements, so that it develops the final version of the tool.

The final output will be used by policy makers and stakeholders to identify what solutions work best in improving rural economy SMEs competitiveness, study how they work and adopt the most suitable best practices to their own regions.



Rural economy's potential in the UK has been underrated and underexploited say academics



The UK Industrial Strategy White Paper was launched in November 2017 by the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. It includes examples, references and plans that embed and infer opportunities for Britain's rural economies.

A relevant workshop was held on March 20th 2018 at the Newcastle University London campus, to give organisations and agencies active in England's rural economies an opportunity to explore and inform plans for implementing the approved UK Industrial Strategy.

According to academics from Newcastle University, in the past rural economies have been overlooked by policymakers when they could be boosting productivity and jobs significantly and helping to rebalance economic growth across Europe. But that picture could be improving with the launch of the UK Government's new Industrial Strategy.

Addressing the meeting of representatives from government departments, local economic partnerships, councils, rural agencies and academics, Professor Jeremy Phillipson from Newcastle University's Rural Enterprise UK initiative and INNOGROW European project, said: "In England alone, rural areas contribute over half a million enterprises, 3.5 million employees and produce output equivalent to the country's ten leading cities outside of London. And yet they have all too often failed to appear in government strategies aimed at boosting growth. So it is heartening to see them featured in this new [Industrial Strategy White Paper](#)."

Study visit in Mantua: Supporting SMEs in rural areas by innovative production policies

The first study visit of INNOGROW project to transfer experiences on innovative production policies was held on 22nd and 23rd February 2018, in Mantua, Italy, organised by the Lombardy Foundation for the Environment (FLA). The event was an opportunity to promote at international level the experience of local rural SMEs that adapted their business model or introduced innovative technologies to respond to the needs of the territory and take advantage from the opportunities that it presents.

30 participants from Greece, Italy, Latvia, United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovenia attended the study visit that took place in the territory of Mantua and

Mincio park that supported the event together with the Department of Architecture, Building and Construction of Politecnico di Milano.

Participants were introduced to the territorial context of the Mincio Park and the measures of the Regional Operational Plan implemented to foster innovation, with presentations from regional authorities, local stakeholders and scientific institutions. Consequently, they were accompanied to an on-field visit to SMEs. They have also discussed the “Sustainability plan supporting rural economy SMEs’ competitiveness policy implementation” in the regions of the INNOGROW partners, and exchanged on the development of a transnational on-line benchmarking platform, evaluating existing policy approaches of European regions on the subject.

Gabriele Busti from DG Economic Development, Lombardy Region, which supports foreign investments and start-ups in the sectors of agriculture, tourism and artisanship talked about regional policies and

measures to promote competitiveness for rural SMEs. Successful experiences in production process were presented by Corrado Benatti, Coop. Alkemica, promoting scientific knowledge and sustainable tourism, and Alessandra Bergamini, Mantua Wine Consortium, promoting the quality through territory values. Regional stakeholders from participating countries were invited to network and build on their knowledge capacity; their impressions were captured in videos that will be available on-line.

After the completion of the INNOGROW study visits, FLA will prepare a summary report presenting the basic lessons learnt.



Regional stakeholder meetings & third party events

INNOGROW partners advanced with the organisation of the next series of regional stakeholder meetings that were an excellent opportunity to gather valuable insights for the specific measures and incentives to support the adoption of innovation by rural economy and to ensure consensus building as regards innovation changes in the field.



Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency organised the 4th stakeholder group meeting on the 23rd of March 2018, hosted by



the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. The meeting organised by the Chamber of Commerce of Molise in December 2017 focused on benchmarking areas to assess the regions’ performance as regards implementation of regional measures that promote innovation adoption to improve rural economy SMEs’ competitiveness. During the stakeholders meeting organised by Zemgale Planning Region, in September 2017, experts from different sectors discussed options for improving the competitiveness of rural

enterprises, increasing exports and promoting new business models. The meeting organised in Kranj, Slovenia by the Business Support Center focused on policies supporting technological and business development of rural SMEs, financial incentives supporting their growth and the introduction of good practices.

Project partners also participated to third party events organised by public authorities in relevant areas of policy-making, to build collaborations and disseminate INNOGROW outcomes. Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice Region, promoted the project results at the event “Actualities and subsidy opportunities from Rural Development Programme 2014-2020”, organized by National Rural Network (Agrovenkov, o.p.s.) on the 16th of February 2018, in the city Ústí nad Orlicí, in Pardubice Region in Eastern Bohemia, in the Czech Republic.

EU-funding for information & promotion measures about agricultural products

EU-funding is provided for information provision and promotion measures concerning agricultural products implemented in the internal market and in third countries with the main objective of enhancing the competitiveness of the Union agricultural sector. The specific objectives are:

- (a) increase awareness of the merits of Union agricultural products and of the high standards applicable to the production methods in the Union;
- (b) increase the competitiveness and consumption of Union agricultural products and certain food products and to raise their profile both inside and outside the Union;
- (c) increase the awareness and recognition of Union quality schemes;

- (d) increase the market share of Union agricultural products and certain food products, specifically focusing on those markets in third countries that have the highest growth potential;
- (e) restore normal market conditions in the event of serious market disturbance, loss of consumer confidence or other specific problems.

Financial support is provided to organisations representative of the agricultural sector concerned on the national or EU level to implement information and promotion campaigns. The co-financing budget for 2016 was 111 million EUR and for 2017 133 million EUR are foreseen. The budget will further increase in the coming years.

More information available [here](#).



Upcoming events & activities - Interregional workshop in Budapest

Title	Interregional workshop in Budapest
Thematic focus	New business models for rural economy SMEs
Host organisation	Pannon Novum West-Transdanubian Regional Innovation Nonprofit LTD (PAN-NOV)
Date	July 2018
Location	Budapest, Hungary
No of participants	20 – 35 participants
Type of participants	Regional authorities' officials, stakeholders, experts
Format	Oral presentations, roundtable discussions



Pannon Novum West-Transdanubian Regional Innovation Nonprofit LTD (PAN-NOV) will host the upcoming interregional workshop on new business models, which is planned to take place in Budapest, Hungary, in July 2018, with the participation of all project partners. The workshop will focus on how to support rural economy SMEs to get involved in new business models. Support measures may include business plans for restructuring production, value chain analysis and quantification analysis.

Moreover, PAN-NOV will develop a relevant input paper to facilitate the interregional workshop. The input paper will include further research on the factors that influence SMEs involvement in new coalitions in INNOGROW regions.

Upcoming events - Study Visit in the Region of Thessaly (GR)

During the next semester a two-days study visit aiming to transfer experiences on innovative production processes will be organised in Thessaly, Greece, a traditional geographic and modern administrative region located in central Greece that has managed to successfully integrate innovative techniques in its regional agricultural production processes. All partners will participate with members of their stakeholder groups and external experts to visit the selected SMEs. The expected outcome is the transfer of experience on technological investments exploited by rural SMEs to modernise their production processes, and on the existing policies that led to these results. The mission is to achieve enhancement of cohesion, acquisition of knowledge and inspiration on how to steer policy implementation in modernisation of production processes.

Workshop details	
Thematic focus	Innovative production processes
Host organisation	Region of Thessaly (Greece)
Date	September 2018
Location	Region of Thessaly (Larissa, Magnesia, Trikala, Karditsa)
No of participants	20 – 25 participants
Type of participants	Stakeholders, external experts
Format	Study visit
Contact details	S. Papadimopoulou s.papadimopoulou@thessaly.gov.gr



PROJECT PARTNERS



Region of Thessaly (GR)



Lombardy Foundation for the Environment
FLA (IT)



Zemgale Planning Region (LV)



The University of Newcastle upon Tyne (UK)



Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development
Agency (BG)



Regional Development Agency of the Pardubice
Region (CZ)



Chamber of Commerce of Molise (IT)



Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, BSC
Business Support Centre Ltd., Kranj (SI)



Pannon Novum West-Transdanubian Regional
Innovation Non-Profit Ltd (BG)



The project will be implemented in two stages. From 2016 until 2019, the implementation of the project plan will take place, aiming at achieving improvements in the tackled area. In the second phase of the project from 2019 to 2021, these improvements will be tested within participating target groups: small and medium-sized enterprises and policy makers, with the objective to promote entrepreneurship and competitiveness in rural areas.

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