



GOOD PRACTICE INVENTORY

Exploiting Potentials of

Social Enterprises through Standardized

European Evaluation

and Development System

SOCIAL SEEDS

Interreg Europe



SME competitiveness



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

I. GOOD PRACTICE COLLECTION

1. Name of the good practice (100 characters)

I.R.E.NE. Innovative & Responsible Economy Network

2. Overview (2000 characters)

The cluster “I.RE.NE.” has been created with the aim of consolidating and promoting models and patterns of social economy among SMEs, spreading the culture of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development and fostering cross-sector interaction processes and the emergence of crosscutting sectors. This pole started thanks to the profitable collaboration of four trade associations active in Abruzzo (Confcooperative Abruzzo, Compagnia delle Opere Abruzzo Molise, Legacoop Abruzzo and Casartigiani Teramo) and thanks to an investment of around 2.600.000 euro in five years.

At the beginning, a total number of 196 members decided to join the consortium IRENE: the involved entities represent a large range of different actors of such as cooperatives, no-profit and social responsibility enterprises, universities and research institutions, foundations, banks and guarantee facilities, service centers for the voluntary sector, associations as well as services companies for the civil economy, operating at national level. At present, the current number of members is 240: they belong to various sectors, from the social innovation and civil economy to the social and health care and education, as well as the tourism, culture and sports system, the building and housing field, energy and environment, agriculture and fishery, business supporting services and finance, credit and guarantees.

IRENE intends to trigger a network of non-profit and social responsible enterprises, supporting their expansion and innovation, also in order to foster the development of innovative projects and initiatives able to involve companies from different sectors and to propose operational models of social responsibility. This implies as a fundamental aspect an ethical and responsible approach with respect to the territorial and social reference system. To achieve its objectives, the cluster has so far implemented a series of activities, training sessions and services tailored to businesses’ needs, becoming one of the “Innovation Poles” identified and approved by the Abruzzo Region.

3. Abstract (500 characters)

I.RE.NE. is a unique regional platform for the growth and the reinforcement of the social innovation system and civil economy in the Abruzzo region.

The main strategy of “I.RE.NE.” is to make a wide range of different actors working together in a synergistic and cooperative way in order to increase the capability of directly matching territorial and sectoral needs, focusing on the development of paths for a regional, solid and

sustainable progress through the continuous sharing of common visions and values related to key concepts such as community welfare, social responsibility, clustering.

4. Coherence with the Dimension of the Social Enterprise Inventory

Social innovation (including services)

Social impact and measurement opportunities

Cooperation atmosphere (PPPs)

Regulatory frameworks and bottom-up grassroots

Social entrepreneurship skills and competencies

Access to finance (including external funding)

Access to market (including the internationalization approach)

New(ly) established social enterprise model

Other (specify): _____

You can tick more than one dimension, but emphasize which one is the most significative!

5. Policy Instrument connected with the good practice

I.RE.NE. has been financed by the ERDF through the Regional Operative Programme 2007-2013 of the Abruzzo Region. The Pole of Social Innovation and Civil Economy has been identified for financial support within the 1st Axis "R&TD, Innovation and competitiveness", Action 1.2 "Support to the existing innovation centres".

6. Location

The official headquarters of I.RE.NE. are located in Pescara but this cluster addresses its activities to support the further development of social economy in all the Abruzzo territory. It is a regional initiative also open to exchange and interaction with thematic experts from other Italian regions and European countries.

7. Start date (tentative)

19-05-2011

8. Total revenue / income created / personnel employed by the good practice (EUR)

Not specified.

9. Challenges

While at EU level the European Commission has been investing in these last years a major effort to support social enterprises and raise awareness on effective social innovation solutions, at national scale the ecosystem for social enterprise in Italy is in a dynamic evolution concerning both legislation and spreading business models. Spending reviews implemented by the Italian Government in response to the economic crisis have reduced the availability of public resources, consequently reducing the opportunity for expansion of social enterprises working with public sector demand. On the other hand, the socio-economic situation creates the drivers for social enterprises to diversify into new markets (private demand) and to become more innovative.

The Abruzzo region has shown a growing interest to the social innovation and social economy sectors, paying a greater attention in implementing activities such as the regional operational tool “More research and Innovation” (“Più Ricerca e Innovazione” ended in November 2015) and the current participative process for the elaboration of a “Social Regional Plan 2016-2018” (ongoing). One of the major issues is to invest resources and time to enhance the value of social relationships, as a vital pivot for innovation’s uptake, for implementing civil and social economy activities able to meet societal challenges and have bigger impacts on the territory.

10. Would this programme work well in another European context?

I.RE.NE. could be work in other contexts in another regional or European context, thanks to the core idea of clustering actors and experiences having in common social business models not only oriented to profit but even more to mutuality, social responsibility, aggregation and integration, territoriality and respect for tradition (in terms of innovation and development). This initiative could be easily replicated in other contexts, by ensuring to pursue similar values aimed at consolidating and promoting a new model of social responsible economy.

11. Activities (2000 characters)

I.RE.NE. cluster have focused on the application of the socially responsible model in several different sectors such as health care and education assistance, sport and culture, tourism, housing and building, energy and environment and financial services, grants and credit. Since 2012, the project has assigned its funds to the creation of local enterprises network, regional observatory, thematic laboratories, promotion of experimental programmes, best practices’ collection and dissemination. Among the most significant initiatives, it is worthwhile to mention:

- **Inc.I.So - The first incubator of social enterprises in Abruzzo:** established thanks to an agreement with the Caritas Foundation, this incubator located in Pescara offers space and tailored services for all those who want to start-up a new social business or consolidate an

existing company, as well as for supporting business projects already undertaken with potential positive impacts on the regional social scenario.

-**Giovani Fuori Gioco**, an experimental programme for the promotion of a prevention model against juvenile gambling and ludopathy in schools, with the inclusion of specific training of teachers and educational staff to become “first agents of detection” and the creation of assessment tools to facilitate the replicability in other schools realities.

-**"Fondazione di comunità"**, a workshop for the constitution and promotion of a network of "*co-profit socialness communities*", defined as groups of enterprises, citizens and institutions working together with the common aim of a sustainable, resilient and responsible territory's development. These *Community foundations* will be engaged in creating a smart regional network able to realise a regional commercial credit-

-**"Cantine Unite"**, a network among the wine cooperatives of the productive chain localised in the province of Chieti, aimed at enhancing the experimentation of a productive model able to sustain and reinforce the competitiveness of the wine-production sector of the entire region;

-**"Terzo Inclusivo"**, an initiative to measure the impact as far as effectiveness and efficiency of the activities/services implemented by the most dynamic regional actors in the social economy, in terms of generating economic value for the territory. The main result of the project consists of a final model for the definition of the added-value of services delivered to people and for "financial reporting" these services, which can be adopted by further social and civil economy operators in the sectors where it was tested.

12. Achievements so far

On the last Assembly of I.RE.NE. Consortium (may 2016) the results showed a higher number of member (220 partners, out of which 7 extra-regional) including universities' researchers, NGO's, cooperatives, and more than 20 implemented initiatives of different dimensions, covering the entire territory of the Abruzzo Region.

Furthermore, as one of the regional poles of innovation, it has been able to give a common voice to the different social entities, becoming a key actor in the political discussion about the credit system for social and mutual enterprises and for welfare system's reform.

13. Strengths, weaknesses, difficulties and lessons learned

The ongoing experience of I.RE.NE. cluster has been so far on analysing and identifying that part of the Abruzzo economic system in which profit is not a goal in itself but it is subordinated to other objectives such as: a) the achievement of the common good as a sort of guidelines towards a sustainable development capacity; b) the maximization of the value of the "territory" in terms of welfare, ability to produce income, ability to create network systems, ability to create working economies, ability to open to new markets.

The major point of strength of the cluster is its increasing skill of creating synergies and raising awareness on opportunities in the field of social and civil economy. What is to improve

is the number of initiatives funded per year (an average of 5), to reinforce the link between the activity of the social enterprises and the policies of local administrations.

The difficulties encountered can be classified as the same at national level: complexity and fragmentation of the legislative framework, lower salaries than in other “markets”, scarcity of economic resources to invest in new initiatives, undervalue of the positive impact of social and civil economy/social innovation solutions.

I.R.E.N.E has learned the high value of building social relationships as a powerful tool to bring and spread for the growth and the promotion of social economy in the Abruzzo Region and not only.

14. Tips for success

The project I.R.E.N.E. has been able to successfully define and implement a great amount of initiatives and it has succeeded in becoming a sort development agency for social enterprises of the Abruzzo Region.

The main reason of this success is the capacity to **create partnerships** between actors working in different sectors in order to create and promote social innovation. This result has been achieved through the implementation of small-sized actions, but deeply linked to the territory and to the communities’ needs. I.R.E.N.E has become the catalyst centre for all the social entities in the Abruzzo region and has been able to define a new model of social innovation production.

15. Dissemination and sustainability

Dissemination is a key action for the success of I.R.E.N.E. project. For this reason the initiative has its own website in which you can its history and mission, the activities financed and implemented and there is also a specific sector, "I.R.E.N.E. Comunica" in which are listed all the communication actions, press documents and every news concerning the project.

I.R.E.N.E is also present on other social media, in particular on YouTube where it has in own channel containing little video about the progresses and promotional information of the project’s main innovations.

Moreover I.R.E.N.E is a project future-oriented, addressed to increase the presence of social and civil enterprises at a regional level. Although it is still working, the main output produced are addressed to all new realities who want to start operating in this field, so that the actions started in the I.R.E.N.E. galaxy will continue producing effects even when the programme will end.

16. Source – URL or Facebook

<http://www.consortileirene.it>

17. Contact person and details

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