**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Professionalising networking activities in rural areas for attractive job opportunities**

**New project “P-IRIS” for improving rural areas’ innovation systems**

Young people are leaving European rural areas because they do not find jobs answering their professional aspirations. There is therefore a need to **boost innovation in rural areas** in order to develop knowledge-based or creative businesses, offering attractive jobs for well-educated and creative young people.

Six partners from Croatia, Finland, Italy, Norway, Slovenia and Spain have launched the **P-IRIS** project – **“Policies to improve rural areas’ innovation systems by professionalising networking activities and use of innovation tools”.** Thepartnership is led by the **Sogn and Fjordane County Municipality from Norway**. The 4,5 year project (January 2017 - June 2021) was approved within the **Interreg Europe programme** financed by the European Regional Development Fund. Interreg Europe programme helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy.

The partners have identified that **triple helix** or**quadruple helix cooperation** (innovation cooperation model  in which  businesses, research actors, public authorities and users cooperate in order to produce innovations) is important to boost innovation in rural areas. The P-IRIS project aims to increase the number of SMEs in innovative networks and the number of innovation projects including research and development.

The Kick-off meeting of the P-IRIS project took place from 25th – 26th April 2017 in Sogndal and Førde (Norway), hosted by Sogn and Fjordane County Municipality. They invited regional and national actors to present Norwegian cases in the field of innovation systems. Actors from different sectors participated at the event: regional authorities, universities and research institution and business support actors.

County Mayor **Jenny Følling** presented main characteristics of Sogn and Fjordane area and their “wealth-creation plan”. **Jon Gunnar Nesse** from Western Norway University of Applied Science and **Øyvind Heimset Larsen** fromWestern Norway Research Institutepresented their report on strategic leadership of innovative networks on the cases from Sogn and Fjordane area. The kick-off meeting took place at **Fosshaugane Campus** in Sogndal which links football stadium, regional university, research institute and Science Park for entrepreneurs. The concept which is building on sport, health, media and networking was presented by **Rolf Navarsete** and **Vidar Bondevik**.

Partners and stakeholders from Croatia, Finland, Italy, Slovenia and Spain learned about the Norwegian innovation system and networks. They visited **TechYard in Førde** hosted by Hellenes Group located at Øyrane in Førde. Technology companies with innovative concepts, technologies and solutions operate inside the TechYard. **Anders Haugen** and **Frode Steen** presented the concept of sharing the equipment and the “inventor club” which is a creative space for children inside the TechYard. Participants were also acquainted with the Norwegian public innovation system, learning about programs for regional development by **Innovation Norway and SIVA.**. The group met **Knut-Henning Hjellbakk** from Stryn Business Garden, who presented **Stryn TechHub** and their idea about local development with high society value.

Project P-IRIS will start with mapping of partners’ situation in terms of challenges and opportunities of managing triple (or quadruple) helix cooperation in rural innovation systems and establishment of common analytical approach. Partners will exchange experience in **thematic seminars** and **study** **visits**. Collected knowledge will contribute to preparation of **regional action plans** for the field of rural innovation systems. In second phase of the project partners will monitor the implementation of the actions plans and evaluate the improvements during the final conference. Partners will be working closely with **regional stakeholders** which will involve representatives of different types of organizations.

**More information about the P-IRIS project:**

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**List of partners in P-IRIS project:**

* Sogn og Fjordane County Municipality (Norway)
* Development Centre of the Heart of Slovenia (Slovenia)
* Local Development Agency PINS (Croatia)
* Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia (Finland)
* Society for the Development of the Province of Burgos (Spain)
* Poliedra – Politecnico di Milano (Italy)

**More information about the P-IRIS project:**

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/p-iris/>