

**Towards an applicable Action Plan for BRIDGES project
in W. Macedonia Region**

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Purpose:

- To explain preparatory steps taken to ensure smooth applicability of the Action Plan.
- To explain how BRIDGES Good Practices and Types of Connectivities (innovation map – Benchmarking Criteria report) are taken up and reinforce the Action Plans.
- To consider next steps and any experienced / anticipated challenges and solutions there might have been faced or are anticipated and what solutions might have been found.

Focus:

- Preparatory actions with the Managing Authority (MA) and in parallel with businesses on integrating Type 2, 5, 7, 8 Connectivities into the Action Plan and into the Regional Operational Programme (ROP) 2014 – 2020 of Western Macedonia.

8.6.2017

Towards an applicable Action Plan for BRIDGES project in W. Macedonia Region: preparatory steps



Background

1. Smooth applicability of the Action Plan aligned with the findings of the innovation map for Western Macedonia.
2. Relevance of BRIDGES Good Practices in order to reinforce the Action Plan.
3. Taking into account experienced / anticipated challenges and considering possible solutions. For example new types of connectivities that would be beneficial to include into the action plan, and how they are accepted locally, even if relevant to the innovation map findings.
4. Involving in more depth the Managing Authority for influencing the ROP of W. Macedonia through the BRIDGES Action Plan.

Alignment with the findings from the Innovation Map

1. **EMPHASIS ON the 5 Innovation Criteria** according to BRIDGES Methodology in order to make clear that Mapping is absolutely focused on them and NOT in the term of INNOVATION in general and its several characteristics. Thus, the Action Plan will be adopted respectively. The Innovation Map (as expected) confirms the RIES3 of W. Macedonia but also identifies most performing business. In this framework the SMEs of Agri-food sector in the Region are identified in the Report.
2. **REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS:** Presentation and discussion of the regional Mapping Report to the Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG, March 2017) & to the MA of the ROP of W. Macedonia 2014 – 2020 (May 2017)
3. **PROFILING SUB-INDUSTRIES WITH INNOVATION PERFORMANCE (OR POTENTIAL):** The next step for PP5 is to organize PP5-to-Business sessions in order to a) raise deeper awareness of the eight connectivities (identified as relevant in the Innovation Map), b) identify business interests in respect to these connectivities and c) identify also unexplored potential for innovation

This approach will allow us to profile an innovation performing sub-industry. This “PP5-to-entrepreneur” approach, guided from PP5 and reaching SMEs, is proposed since the food processing industry (as identified through the innovation map) has small critical mass and economic affect in the regional economy. What we are looking for is cross cutting actions improving the innovation performance of this group leading to growth and impact for them and the Region.

8.6.2017

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- 2. Relevance of BRIDGES Good Practices (1)
- Concerning the Good Practices, these are being discussed and evaluated within the Regional Stakeholders Group (RSG). The approach for the 3 BRIDGES Themes in W. Macedonia is:
- Theme 1: The Competence Center, as a structure, is typically foreseen as Indicative Action in the ROP but the Managing Authority doesn't see it as a real need. In this case, the Theme 1 GP's transfer is under discussion mainly concerning part(s) of such a structure to be adopted in the framework of improvement of the Capacity Building of RIS3 policy implementation in the Region.
- Theme 2: The members of the RSG and especially those coming from the Educational and Research Institutions of the Region expressed their strong interest and support for R2B collaboration. The analysis report from the Advisory Partners will be useful tool in order to identify potential R2B co-operation adopting also Good Practices from BRIDGES Theme 2. As problem is considered the fact that R2B interregional (among European regions) funding is under the approval of proposals form very demanding and competitive Financial Instruments and Programmes (i.e. HORIZON).
- Theme 3: The transfer of GPs from this Theme is directly related to technological and commercial solutions according to the Businesses' needs, that have to be identified. Simultaneously funding opportunities must be identified and for that purpose ANKO utilizes the Enterprise Europe Network (EEN) antenna that hosts, starting already discussions with the SMEs that where identified in the Mapping report. This work will continue, but it has to be mentioned that a representative of one SME from W. Macedonia (Voion Land Products) is following the works of the 4th BRIDGES meeting here in Helsinki for Networking (under Theme 2 also).

2. Relevance of BRIDGES Good Practices (2)

Concerning the type of connectivities that are being arising from all the Mapping reports, in order to reinforce the regional Action Plan by adopting them, these are already identified in the BRIDGES Benchmarking Criteria report. For W. Macedonia these Types of connectivities are the following:

- Type 2: Access to research services (GP Theme 2)
- Type 5: Innovation management chain (GP Theme 2)
- Type 7: Commercialisation of research, cross border (GP Theme 3)
- Type 8: Direct research to business co operations (GP Theme 3)

These 4 Types are already pre-identified as Specific Goals of W. Macedonia's BRIDGES Action Plan in order to be adopted as respective Priority Axis.

2. Experienced / anticipated challenges & proposed solutions

- Based on the Regional Profile of Agri-food, as it was illustrated in the Mapping report, and the main priorities that RIS3 policy sets for W. Macedonia, the (up-to-now) MAIN and SUMMARISED recognized challenges and the proposed solutions concerning the BRIDGES Methodological Framework and Time schedule (Phase 1: Preparation of Action Plan, Phase 2: Implementation of Action Plan) are listed in the following Table:

Challenges	Solutions
Enhancement of competitiveness of the Agri-food sector.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elaboration of a Road Map for Agri-food or/and its sub-industries within or in parallel with BRIDGES Project, aligned with the RIS3 policy. 2. Promotion of innovative start-up SMEs . 3. Enhancement of R2B and interregional synergies and access to Research services for businesses. 4. Promotion of new products. 5. Promotion of ICT services.
Enhancement of competitiveness of existing Agri-food SMEs.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promotion of RTDI among SMEs and enhancement of their extroversion and position in the markets. 2. Support of clustering and networking.
Effective implementation of RIS3 policy in general and also in particular for the Agri-food sector.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Elaboration of an effective BRIDGES Action Plan promoting technological and commercial solutions along with RIS3 Capacity Building. 2. Promotion of innovation management chain.
BRIDGES Action Plan typically completed in March 2019 and be implemented for 2 years later, while the first Calls for RIS3 Actions from ROP will open earlier.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.Speed – up the BRIDGES Action Plan in W. Macedonia. 2. Close and effective collaboration with the MA of the ROP.

4. Involving in more depth the MA (1)

- In a very fruitful and efficient meeting with the Head of the Managing Authority (Kozani, 24 May 2017), the following topics were discussed:
- The Action Plan, in order to be aligned with RIS3 policy in the region, must include eligible Indicative Actions related to the following Thematic Objectives (T.O.) of the ROP:
- T.O. 1. Strengthening research, technological development and innovation
- T.O. 2. Enhancing access to, and use and quality of information and communication technologies (ICT)
- T.O. 3. Enhancing the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)
- T.O. 8. Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labour mobility
- The MA isn't keen on utilizing, through the ROP, the Article 70 of the General Regulation of the Structural Funds in order to fund interregional Activities in total, but only (and potentially) referring to transfer of knowledge through study visits of experts.
- The Agri-food sector is acknowledged as one among prioritized industries of the RIS3 Policy Document, submitted by the MA and approved by the EC. The BRIDGES Innovation Map confirms also the innovation potential (i.e. potential for upscale diversification) of the RIS3 Priority. Thus, the BRIDGES Action Plan must be aligned with the implementation of RIS3 in W. Macedonia, funded by the ROP 2014 – 2020.

4. Involving in more depth the MA (2)

- In addition to technological and commercial needs of SMEs, the BRIDGES Action Plan must also deal with administrative issues of the RIS3 Policy Implementation, as the Administrative Scheme hasn't been established yet in its total form in the Region. Thus, BRIDGES project impact can influence the CAPACITY BUILDING of RIS3 Policy in W. Macedonia.
- In respect to the above issues, i.e. the capacity building needs, the Methodological Pre-Identification done so far, acknowledges as main Targets of the Action Plan the:
 - Improvement of technological and commercial position of Agri-food sector businesses in the Region.
 - Effectiveness of Capacity Building of RIS3 Policy implementation in W. Macedonia.
- Possibly, if available, Good Practices for the BRIDGES project can benefit these two needs.

4. Involving in more depth the MA (3)

- The MA will not “commit” any amount for the implementation of BRIDGES or any other INTERREG EUROPE project.
- Instead of that and as the BRIDGES Action Plan will be typically finalized in March 2019, the MA and PP5 agreed to collaborate from now in the previously mentioned topics. As all the first-round Calls for RIS3 Actions are expected to open during 2017, PP5 in co-operation with BRIDGES co-ordinator will support with material (i.e. criteria of innovation, technological identified solutions, synergy schemes, identified indicated actions etc.) the MA, even for the formulation of the open Calls.
- For that purpose, it was agreed in the meeting that PP5 in co-operation with BRIDGES co-ordinator will provide supportive material for the forthcoming (in June 2017) Open Call of the Investment Priority 1.b “Investments in Research and Innovation” of W. Macedonia ROP 2014 – 2020. The Indicative Types of Actions of this Investment Priority are:
 - 1.2.A. Synergy and Networking Actions among Research / Education Bodies and Businesses in RIS3 regional Priority Sectors (i.e. synergy schemes, clusters etc.)
 - 1.2.B. Promotion of Research and Innovation into Businesses in RIS3 regional Priority Sectors (i.e. Innovation Coupons, Competence Centers, Spin-offs, Living Labs etc.)
 - The relevant material is now being prepared.

Thank you for your attention

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