

Minutes of the Working Groups Discussions

2nd Meeting of the RUMORE project

Almelo, the Netherlands, 28-29 September 2017

Venue: 28th: Indie Terrain, Almelo; 29th: Community home, Haven Zuidzijde 30, Almelo

Material: Annex: Overview of all partner answers received per e-mail prior to the discussions

During the partner meeting in Almelo, all meeting participants discussed and exchanged on selected questions from each of the Working Groups (WG) in the project. The main results of the discussion as well as summary of important aspects mentioned by the partners in their written answers to the chairs of the WGs have been put together as follows.

Working Group 1 - Influencing RIS3 towards rural-urban partnerships

Question:

"Are there any urban-rural projects/aspects in the smart specialisation strategy (RIS3) of your region? If so, please describe them in detail (including action field, goals, strategies, actors/institutions involved etc.) and describe some ideas regarding their transferability to the other RUMORE-regions."

Main findings:

- Many of the RIS3 strategies of the partner regions recognize the existence of regional disparities and the current concentration of research and development activities in urban areas. The challenges faced by rural areas are addressed differently in the RIS3 strategies and should be seen in close relation with the sectoral focus of the strategies.
- In general, the economic development in rural areas is characterized by the existence of SMEs that do not have own development departments. This necessitates the establishment of networks that support the transfer of knowledge and technology to SMEs in rural areas. The need to support networks has been recognized in many of the strategies. The RIS3 Strategy for Lower Saxony, for instance, promotes the application of financial and consultation instruments to support knowledge transfer and innovation activities in SMEs and in craft businesses. This is to a large extent possible due to the existence of so called economic development agencies in every county that advise individual enterprises. The Programme OP-Oost (covering Twente) goes in a similar direction. It places a strong focus on support for SMEs funding, for instance projects that stimulate cooperation in research and development, pilots and living labs, network and cluster activities between SMEs.
- The focus on cluster development is also clear in the RIS3 of Lombardy region. Lombardy RIS3 foresees the promotion of technology clusters in specific smart specialisation areas, such as for instance high technology cluster for agrofood. This cluster predominantly targets highly specialized enterprises that are mainly located in the urban core and environment. Currently, the identification of schemes for financial support of projects in the metropolitan peripheral areas is a challenge. So far, the problematic of the urban-rural divide has mainly been addressed within the "guide" and the financial support of EU-funded projects. To address the urban-rural divide attempts are currently done to bring together the interests of the rural

districts that represent the rural economy with the technological clusters that are foreseen in the RIS3 strategy for Lombardy.

- The majority of the strategies do not directly address the connection or the need for linkages between urban and rural areas. This could be explained by the strong sectoral focus of the strategies. Urban-rural dimensions, could however be recognized within specific sectors, such as the agrofood sector. This is the case for instance in the RIS3 of Northern Netherlands (covering Amsterdam) that places a focus on circular economy. Possibilities for improvement of the strategy are seen with relation to the integration of new approaches of agrofood chains with regard to circular economy innovation.
- The urban-rural thematic is rather addressed by strategic documents at a lower territorial level. This is the case, for instance, with the regional strategy Green Metropolis Twente. Within this strategy a recent project called ‘Mineral Valley Twente’ was developed. This project focusses on circular economy with regard to the use of nutrients in the Agro and Food sector. In cooperation with universities and entrepreneurs from the cities of region Twente, crossovers are developed to reuse the surplus of nutrients in chemical and manufacturing industry.

Outstanding tasks in WPI:

During the discussion it has been agreed that each project partner will prepare a short overview of the territorial coverage, strategic orientation and time plan for the future calls and evaluation phases of their RIS3 strategies. HCU will elaborate a template and circulate this to all partners.

Working Group 2 – Institutionalising urban-rural linkages

Question:

“How can you “convince” rural and urban actors to network and work on common themes? Are there obstacles and how do/did you manage to overcome them?”

Main findings:

The analysis of the answers received from the project partners led to focus on major points which pop up as main positive findings as well as obstacles that are still to overcome:

Main positive findings:

- Cooperation come from mutual benefit / win-win situations and common / shared agendas;
- Positive linkages build on concrete projects and on / by means of established networks that give structure and strength to urban rural connections;
- Importance of communication and incentives (EU and institutional funds) for partnerships as starting and accompanying measures in processes;
- Creation of new territorial visions as a new rationale of regional development “to trigger” positive connections.

Main standing obstacles:

- General mistrust between rural and urban sides;
- “Blind” policies in rural-urban governance (too much top-down) – policies forget territorial heritage;
- Missing or weak stakeholders’ commitment.

Starting from these considerations, it is clear that the core issue is to define joint goals for both rural and urban sides, so that a common vision and mutual interests even if with different approaches lead to a shared rural-urban territorial governance (without “sides”). The most important way to obtain both rural and urban interest is the involvement of urban and rural actors with a determined critical mass willing to invest time and economical resources in cooperation. In fact, institutional and private energies with dedicated technical and political time, work and commitment is vital to join efforts to overcome the above mentioned difficulties.

Outstanding tasks in WG2 (actually overall considerations emerging from WG2’s first steps):

The contribution from local stakeholders is needed in building this process: learning events can be a good moment to share different experience and learn from other positive practices, as well as to generate further commitment in relevant stakeholders. It will be helpful to prepare core thematics and good practices presented in each learning event beforehand, so that relevant stakeholders can be invited by PPs to participate and are able to capitalize at best on the event.

Working Group 3 – Empowering and mobilising innovation actors

Question:

"In which way do we best reach target groups and mobilise innovation actors for and with the use of policy instruments?"

Main findings:

- ➔ Bring together stakeholders in the framework of various occasions (events, regional economic development days, entrepreneurial discovery, LSG, etc.). This will allow them to know each other better on a face to face basis, which usually helps people overcome barriers and look for the connecting points.
- ➔ Present win-win scenarios for their cases: when stakeholders see a perspective that can bring a certain profit for their own organization, they are obviously more positive about any common activity. This in turn will allow for their enhanced motivation and mobilization around any similar action taken.
- ➔ Apply procedures and techniques to boost cooperation, using soft structures and, if available, hard infrastructure as well. These are the cases of the facilities for cooperation in Twente, the Business Incubation in Burgas, the Innovation for Entreprises in Milano, etc.
- ➔ Support financially and politically, in order to demonstrate that this activity is endorsed; this, in turn, has a multiplying effect, as it allows for further commitment at local/regional level. Such are the cases for instance of the Agro-nutrition coalition in Central Macedonia, the Hamburg example of pre-financing applications, etc.
- ➔ Establish – or help to establish – a common vision among the actors involved; this allows for actors and stakeholders to feel part of a greater common goal and commit to its objectives, under the same umbrella with other organizations. Such an action is strongly emphasized in the case of the Agro-nutrition coalition in Central Macedonia.
- ➔ Related to the previous point, the question of institutionalizing or not such efforts, there was not any clear answer: partners and stakeholders have declared their preference to both options, as some of them were in favour of the institutionalization, where others supported a more “open” form of cooperation.
- ➔ Perceive the Policy Instrument in question as a platform for discussion but also for mobilization of stakeholders. This is a key point for further exploitation, as it forms Interreg Europe’s main focus point: the Policy Instrument requires a long and demanding effort for changes to take place and this allows for a more intensive interaction among actors.