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## **Interview: Dr. Michailides Constantinos**

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#### **1) The RUMORE project aims to strengthen innovation capacities by fostering rural-urban cooperation and partnerships. What is the significance of this topic for the Region of Central Macedonia?**

The Region of Central Macedonia, and especially the Metropolitan Unit of Thessaloniki, is an area with many research institutes and businesses that produce innovation in the agri-food sector. However, it has been documented that this great research community has limited links with the surrounding rural community. The limited connection between the parties has reduced interactions and a desired transfer of innovations between the urban and rural areas.

The RUMORE project investigates opportunities to foster cooperation to deal with this issue, which will provide important lessons for

our Region on how to better link these two ecosystems and create successful and long lasting synergies, for the benefit of both the research community and the people living in rural areas. We recognise that through cooperation and partnerships, the unused potential of both parties can be unleashed resulting in improved employment possibilities for the rural communities, creating the incentives for the people to stay and prosper in rural areas, as well as to keep researchers and innovation providers in our Region to maintain our competitiveness in the market.

#### **2) What are the main obstacles that discourage cooperation between stakeholders from urban and rural areas in the Region of Central Macedonia? How can this cooperation be strengthened?**

The Region's rural communities often do not share communication networks or interact

with urban areas, which limits their market knowledge of innovations that could be

realized in their enterprises. And because of this limited interaction, conversely, research and innovators do not develop innovations that are highly applicable to rural enterprises. There is also a misunderstanding among the two ecosystems as the rural world perceives that innovations produced usually do not apply in a real environment and the urban

innovation providers believe that people living in rural areas are resistant to adopting new technologies. By bringing together these two ecosystems and facilitating mutual exchange on their values and needs, the Region of Central Macedonia is strengthening cooperation to benefit both sides.

### **3) How the Region of Central Macedonia is dealing with the issue of rural-urban cooperation and partnerships? Are there any initiatives in that direction?**

The Region of Central Macedonia is aiming to form bridges and foster cooperation between innovation producers and the end-users, in research and entrepreneurial domains. For this purpose, a permanent Mechanism for Supporting Innovation and Entrepreneurship has been established in the Region under the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support; a One-Stop Liaison Office (OSLO). The aim of this office is to promote the development of areas which have potential to be an intermediary. The RUMORE project provided the opportunity to add the promotion of rural urban cooperation within the strategy and daily tasks of OSLO. RUMORE's Action Plan, which will be

implemented by OSLO includes initiatives that will enable the Region of Central Macedonia to enhance the promotion of cooperation and partnerships in the agri-food sector.

In autumn 2019, the Regional Operational Programme of Central Macedonia 2014-2020 will provide a call for innovation vouchers, a scheme which will fund cooperation among research institutes and businesses. The OSLO will participate in several informative sessions about this scheme and will make a response to emphasize the importance of rural urban cooperation and promote the submission of proposals that align with this aim.

### **4) Can you name some successful innovation delivery projects from the Region of Central Macedonia that are good examples for the integration of rural areas in innovation chains, and for the transfer of knowledge between different regional actors?**

The Directorate of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support has been nominated as the structure responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of the current RIS3 strategy of the Region. In order to be aware of all the developments relevant to Smart Specialization

Strategy, our Directorate is following closely the Smart Specialization Thematic Platforms, set up by the Joint Research Center of the European Commission. More specifically, the Region is taking part in three interregional partnerships concerning the S3 Agri-Food Plat-

form. One of these interregional partnerships is the “High-Tech Farming”, which is our initiative that brings together innovation providers from other European regions with farmers and stakeholders from our Region. The purpose of this was to integrate innovations produced in research institutes and urban areas, and to embed them into the day to day practice of farmers in rural commu-

nities. In the context of the “High Tech Farming” interregional partnership, a pilot project has emerged called “Fresh Fruit”. The project involves research and development of technologies which are applied in agriculture to benefit farmers. Following the success of this first pilot project, other pilot projects are developing, as well as business plans for the scaling up of cooperative partnerships.

### **5) What are your expectations from the participation of the Region of Central Macedonia in the European project RUMORE?**

The Region of Central Macedonia is expecting to learn good practices from other regions and cities as to how we can design our policies to promote rural urban cooperation and partner-

ships in our Region. The RUMORE project and its Action Plan will assist the Region to improve its regional policy, rural development policy and other policies.