

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE - Call 1

Programme priority:	1.2 - To improve skills and entrepreneurial competences for advancing economic and social innovation in central European regions
Project acronym:	CERlecon
Project title:	CENTRAL EUROPE Regional Innovation Ecosystems Network

Project Summary

Change is still needed to make the cities and regions in central Europe better places to work and live. Daring young entrepreneurs with brilliant ideas could contribute considerably to this change. But they can't. Factors such as a lack of an entrepreneurial culture and mind-set leading to a limited interest in entrepreneurship are hampering their efforts. There is also inadequate training to improve their skills and entrepreneurial competences and innovation in general is being hampered by the lingering effects of the historical east-west divide and the recent economic crisis through an underinvestment in R&D.

And yet, entrepreneurs must be empowered to create change; they "form the majority of business entities and are the biggest employers" in central Europe. "It is important to provide, at regional level, the right mix of financial and non-financial support to assist entrepreneurs to create new firms."

"And this is our goal. By the end of 2018, we will have contributed to a change in the way entrepreneurs are inspired, trained and supported through a balanced package of strategies, actions plans, pilot actions, training, and tools to create new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems in seven central Europe regions." The approach has three logical steps: Development – Implementation - Improvement. "We want entrepreneurs and SMEs to benefit the most from our project but also their regions will benefit because from now on regional smart specialization strategies will be used to develop novel technologies, and brilliant products and services for economic and social innovation." The joint development of all outputs and a transnational network interlinking the regional ecosystems to improve international SME skills emphasize the project's transnational character. At present, there is presumably no such state-of-the art innovative support scheme in central Europe. "That is why everything that we do will be transferable for the benefit of others."

Project main objective

The objective of the project is to increase the skills of employees in the business sector (particularly SMEs) in CE Member States regarding novel technologies, innovative products, services or processes and social innovation contributing to regional smart specialisation strategies.

An entrepreneurial culture will be developed and fostered so that more and more young females and males are inspired to become entrepreneurs and develop their own SMEs. Their skills and entrepreneurial competences will be improved through the best possible regional support and training available in new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems. These ecosystems will incorporate and utilise regional smart specialisation strategies (RIS3) as drivers for innovation. A transnational network interlinking the ecosystems will provide entrepreneurs with opportunities to increase their international skills in an international business environment. The result will be a significant advancement in economic and social innovation in central Europe making cities and regions "better places to work and live".

By the end of 2018, CERlecon will have contributed to a change in the way entrepreneurs are inspired, trained and supported through a balanced package of strategies, actions plans, pilot actions, training, and tools to create new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems in a majority of central European Member States.

Project partnership

Partner	Partner Abbreviation	Country
Stadtschulrat für Wien, Europa Büro	EUB	AUSTRIA
Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien	WU	AUSTRIA
Regione del Veneto - Sezione Lavoro	Region of Veneto	ITALY
ENAIIP Veneto Impresa Sociale	ENAIIP VENETO I.S.	ITALY
Wirtschaftsförderung Region Stuttgart GmbH.	WRS	GERMANY
Hochschule der Medien Stuttgart	HdM	GERMANY
Magistrát hlavného mesta SR Bratislavy	The City of Bratislava	SLOVAKIA
Slovak Business Agency	SBA	SLOVAKIA
Grad Rijeka	City of Rijeka	CROATIA
Znanstveno-tehnološki park Sveučilišta u Rijeci	Step Ri	CROATIA
Statutární město Brno, městská část Brno-střed	Brno- střed	CZECH REPUBLIC
Hospodářská Komora České Republiky	HKCR	CZECH REPUBLIC
Gmina Miejska Kraków - Urząd Miasta Krakowa	UMK	POLAND
Izba Przemysłowo-Handlowa w Krakowie	CCCI	POLAND

Project specific objectives

Specific objective 1

Developing two smart strategy and action plans for: (1) new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems; (2) a transnational innovation network to interlink the ecosystems

Description

The two smart strategies target the challenges described in C.1 and are the basis for the changes that will be achieved during project lifetime. On the one hand they will contribute to the main objective of inspiring young females and males to start SMEs and improve their skills and entrepreneurial competences to advance economic and social innovation. (The target is at least 210 SMEs). On the other, they will be the basis for the expected results of an increase of capacities in the public/private sectors in seven CE regions to improve their regional SMEs during project lifetime and to continue to improve them and others after project lifetime. Developed in transnational cooperation, the strategies are the basis for the other thematic WPs.

Specific objective 2

Implementing the new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems and transnational innovation network in the project regions to improve skills and entrepreneurial competences

Description

New-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems – in project terminology **Playparks** - are regional physical centres of excellence; one Playpark per region. Each regional Playpark will inspire and train at least 30 SMEs (project total 210+) during project lifetime. The Playparks will provide SME improvement training in all six domains of a successfully functioning ecosystem (cf. C.1 Project

approach/D. Isenberg) and they will be interlinked in a transnational network to improve international skills.

The ecosystems and network will be prepared according to clearly defined action plans with breakdowns of strategy goals and objectives into timelines of specific tasks, etc (WP1) and pilot actions to implement and test these novel schemes.

Specific objective 3

Improving skills and entrepreneurial competences of SMEs in CE regions at new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems and in a transnational innovation network

Description

This objective deals with “an integrated bottom-up approach involving and coordinating relevant actors” (CPR). In CERlecon’s case, the approach must involve the main relevant actors: the regional entrepreneurs/SMEs that will be initially inspired in two-day regional Playpark idea generation laboratories. Following that they will have an eleven-month comprehensive training at the regional Playpark to improve their skills and competences. During which they will take part in five-day joint trainings at other regional Playparks within the network; pitch their ideas at transnational Playpark Finals and much more. Finally, they will be asked to evaluate their total training experience leading to an optimisation of the project’s smart strategies.

Project structure: Work package description

WP1 Project coordination and management

WP2 Project promotion, dissemination and networking

WP3 Strategy and action plans for new-type innovation ecosystems interlinked in a transnational network

Work package description

This WP is the strategic starting point for tackling the common challenges previously highlighted. These are: (1) lack of an entrepreneurial culture; (2) limited interest in entrepreneurship; (3) inadequate training and support; (4) lingering effects of economic development.. The WP will address these issues and produce four outputs through six activities to achieve project specific objective 1.

Output 1: Seven regional action plans based on a draft strategy concept to implement new-type comprehensive innovation ecosystems – ‘Playparks’. Two activities will deliver this output: (1) analysis of current regional entrepreneurship/SME support and training provision, leading to (2) the elaboration of the draft strategy concept and seven regional action plans.

Output 2: One transnational action plan based on a draft strategy concept to implement a transnational network interlinking the ecosystems – ‘Playpark network’. Two activities will deliver this output. (1) analysis of current transnational entrepreneurship/SME support and training provision, leading to (2) the elaboration of the draft strategy concept and the transnational action plan.

Output 3: A final new-type comprehensive innovation ecosystems (Playparks) strategy. The relevant activity will closely involve the policy level in the project regions to ensure the sustainability of the strategy and regional Playparks after project lifetime.

Output 4: A final transnational network strategy interlinking regional innovation ecosystems with the close involvement of the policy level to ensure the sustainability of the network.

The WP is logically the basis for the two following thematic WPs. As in all CERlecon WPS, all project partners will be involved in all activities and outputs.

WP4 New-type innovation ecosystems in seven CE regions interlinked in a transnational network

Work package description

This WP deals with the practical implementation of the new-type comprehensive regional innovation ecosystems and transnational innovation network in the project regions to improve skills and entrepreneurial competences. Pilot actions will test and evaluate these novel schemes and the results and practices will feed back into the final versions of the WP1 strategies, which will be transferable to other institutions and territories. The WP will produce three outputs through six activities to achieve project specific objective 2.

Output 1: [Seven regional](#) pilot actions to implement new-type comprehensive [innovation ecosystems \(Playparks\)](#). Two activities will deliver this output: (1) analysis of current regional implementation needs, leading to (2) the elaboration and implementation of seven regional pilot actions.

Output 2: [One transnational](#) pilot action to implement a network interlinking the ecosystems [\(Playpark network\)](#). Two activities will deliver this output. (1) analysis of current transnational implementation needs, leading to (2) the elaboration and implementation of one transnational pilot action.

Output 3: [Joint-training of ecosystem staff \(Playpark trainers\)](#). Again, two activities will lead to this output. (1) An initial five-day joint training of at least 21 Playpark trainers (three per region) who will evaluate the training along with an evaluation of the training provision team in order to improve the training methodology. (2) After 12 months of work at the regional Playparks, the same trainer group will be trained in a five-day augmented joint-training, which after evaluation will lead to the final train-the-trainers methodology.

This WP is the next logical next step after WP1 and prepares the way for the final WP. As in all CERlecon WPS, all project partners will be involved in all activities and outputs.

WP5 Improving skills and competences for economic and social innovation in seven CE regions

Work package description

This WP will directly improve the skills and entrepreneurial competences of SMEs in seven CE regions. Three cohorts of trainees will be involved. 1st cohort: [potential entrepreneurs will be inspired in regional Playpark idea generation laboratories](#). Then [10+ start-up SMEs per region \(= 70+ SMEs in total\) will be selected for a further six-month improvement training at their regional Playpark and in the network](#). Equal numbers of economic and social innovation business ideas and equal numbers of females and males will be selected. At the end of training, the SMEs will evaluate the training experience. This will lead to an optimisation of the project's strategies. The process will be repeated in a 2nd and 3rd cohort. During project lifetime, 210+ SMEs ('n' individuals) will be involved in improvement training.

Four outputs through four activities will be produced to achieve project specific objective 3.

Output 1: An online transnational business orientation tool to improve skills and entrepreneurial competences. One activity will deliver this output: (1) development and implementation of an online transnational business orientation tool

Output 2: 1st cohort training – improving regional and transnational skills and entrepreneurial competences including final evaluation. One activity will deliver this output: (1) Improving regional and transnational skills and entrepreneurial competences in seven CE regions including a final evaluation to improve the project strategies.

Output 3: 2nd cohort training and **Output 4:** 3rd cohort training are identical to Output 2.

This WP is the result of the previous WPs and demonstrates the CERlecon vision – the sustainable improvement of skills and entrepreneurial competences to advance economic and social innovation. As in all CERlecon WPs, all project partners will be involved in all activities and outputs.

