

Mid Term Conference in Coimbra, Portugal

The Mid Term Conference was held at the University campus of Coimbra, Portugal, on the 15th June, where ERMIS partners and regional stakeholders met to exchange experiences on the project's 1st phase results and analyse progress made.

"It was an excellent opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved since the start of the project in January 2010, and to present to the larger public work done so far, and discuss issues and challenges to be solved," commented ERMIS Project Director, **Philippe Chereau**. The mayor of Penela, **Paulo Julio**, opened the plenary session and welcomed ERMIS partners, stakeholders, the political body from 9 EU countries, and set the context of the conference within the role of the award winning Pedro Nunes Institute (IPN), as best science based incubator 2010. This was followed by a welcome note from its President of the Board of IPN, **Prof. Teresa Mendes**, host of the event. She outlined the role & impact of the IPN incubator in developing the business sector of the central region of Portugal, where its stakeholders such as the Mayor of Penela were strongly committed and supportive. She went on to explain that strong links between the academic and scientific sectors resulted in a dynamic cooperation between national and international innovation networks. During the conference, 3 focused presentations were held on key topics, covering issues of regional policies supporting innovation, highlighted by several company testimonials from IPN incubator spin-offs. **Jorge Miguel Figueira**, Chief of Division, Innovation & Knowledge transfers from Coimbra University, detailed its strategic plan for the promotion of innovation throughout the region. Followed by Dr. Paulo Santo, Executive Director of IPN, who presented the IPN model, recognising that the development of a spin-off strategy was a valid way to leverage and motivate scientific talent.

Questions from the floor varied from strategy, management, financing issues, to key success factors of entrepreneurial science base start-ups, among others.

Responses and comments by Philippe Chereau, ERMIS Project Director, Prof. Teresa Mendes, President of the Board, IPN Incubator, Paulo Julio, Mayor of Penela Municipality, were very well received by the audience.

Break out sessions were regularly planned throughout the day giving stakeholders the opportunity to discuss the challenges and options facing the ERMIS best practice transfer process with other attendees. In addition to asking direct questions, on how it would be taken forward and adapted to current and future regional political policies.

On-Going ERMIS Project Activities & Highlights

Now Available... Our context-specific, ERMIS Best Practice catalogue is now available, featuring different phases of the innovation value chain, (technological transfers, financing, cross fertilization, incubation, networking...).



The ERMIS project has now reached the stage of intensifying the transfer of experiences between partner countries, after months of hard work collecting data & results from each partners' regional swot analysis.

ERMIS innovation experts, **Ludovic Di Biaggio** , Skema Business School, France, and **Lorenzo Ciapetti**, Cesena, Italy, presented attendees at the Mid Term conference with an initial Best Practice transfer template, enabling partners to select, qualify, and follow-up BP transfers according to their place-based contingencies. This was followed by a preliminary output of methodological recommendations for evaluating territorial innovation policies from the same “place-based” perspective, thus following the recent insights from EU innovation authorities.

Study tours are now underway throughout partner regions and are a unique opportunity to share knowledge and mutual experiences. It is less a “visit” than a total immersion and hands-on approach to how things are done and to explore directly, how other partner regions are successful in boosting the growth of SMEs thanks to appropriate innovation policies.

During the study tour organised by the ERMIS lead partner, (French Riviera Chamber of Commerce in Sophia Antipolis), project partners had the possibility to visit, public innovation agencies and research centres. They also attended forums, business club meetings, lectures on the valorisation of innovative projects in SMEs, and conducted a wide range of interviews with academia and local Start-Ups. From this, they were able to discover contrasts in the implementation and contributing success factors of regional programs, policies, and cultural attitudes towards innovation efforts. To date, several partner regions have been visited (See details of the study tour below)

Sophia Antipolis, France Study Tour 8th & 9th June :

Touring Partner countries to see impacts and innovations at work!

For two days, a delegation of 11 project partners participated in an intensive study tour based on 3 best practices from the lead partner, the French Riviera Chamber of Commerce. Throughout the entire programme, the delegation was able to experience first-hand innovation activities, organised by private and public sectors in the technological science park of Sophia Antipolis, France.

The tour was an excellent opportunity to delve more deeply into issues touched upon in the partners' identified best practice of promoting creativity, and cross sourcing local innovation. It also enabled productive discussions with stakeholders and local SMEs, about new ideas and the lessons learnt from their application.

The ERMIS study tour programme continued with the scheduled Industrial Property club meeting, “Club Action Brevet”, sponsored by INPI (Institut National de la Propriété Industrielle, France). Every 6 weeks, over 70 club members, comprised of



local SMEs and Industrial Property experts, unite to discuss topics pertaining to current innovation issues. During this evening meeting, delegation members were able to exchange and share their views and experiences on “Due Diligence”. Group work sessions were also on the agenda where delegation participants learnt about VALOR'INNOV, a program detecting innovative projects in SMEs. The objective is to place SMEs back on track by aligning the organisational configuration of the firm, to strategic choices addressed by the project. The potential novelty and marketability of the firm’s innovation is also validated by the programme coach.

Due to the initiatives of VALOR'INNOV, most of the 40 participating SMEs, joined networks or competitive clusters. 20% engaged in collaborative research programmes with academic research centers and other businesses. They also saw an increase of 10 to 15% in global sales after 18 months, and generated 2 to 3 recruitments during the same period. This program has also enabled firms to formulate a comprehensive business plan related to their project, which has proved useful in discussions with public and private investors.

Delegates continued their tour with a visit to the ERMIS partner CASA offices (Sophia Antipolis Community Agglomeration), where they met students from the “Young Shoots Challenge”. A group of future entrepreneurs, forming pluridisciplinary teams with the single objective of learning how to create an innovative company. They are coached over several months by volunteer professionals and local SMEs’ executives. Each team presents their project in fields as varied as technology, law, culture, medicine, to a jury made up of experts in the specific field. The finalist receives a budget enabling them to improve their project for the final in October 2011. An innovative way to discover the joys and anxieties of creating a company!

Also on the agenda was a visit to the DEVCOM Azur Innovation B to B trade fair, showcasing current tendencies in innovative technology and attended by over 1,283 participants. The visit gave our ERMIS visitors the opportunity to speak directly with over 80 regional innovative SMEs, exhibiting the originality and ingenuity of their company services. The afternoon visit allowed the delegation to choose among several speed business meetings, 33 workshops and over 180 speed demos.

Throughout the day, visitors could visit the ERMIS booth present in a space dedicated to innovation stakeholders, together with public agencies, research laboratories, universities, and regional incubators. The forum ended with an Innovation & Digital Trophy Award and as jury members, ERMIS project partners replied to journalists conducting on the spot interviews from a live TV platform.

Taking a closer look at the Institute Pedro Nunes (IPN), Portugal!



Institute Pedro Nunes (IPN) awarded “Best Science based incubator award” in 2010 was an initiative of Coimbra University, Portugal.

This non-profit private organization for innovation and technology transfers serve as the main link between industry and high education institutions, namely the University of Coimbra. IPN’s main objective is to develop R&D projects, as well as make accessible to start-ups, industry tests, measurements and other studies, that require highly sophisticated apparatus and specialised knowhow.

The incubator plays a major role in supporting R&D partnerships with the Portuguese business sector, in addition to offering specialized training and support to tech-based firms. They are internally equipped with a number of technological laboratories, which are complemented by marketing and project management departments, in order to promote and assist start-ups of technology-intensive firms, usually spin-offs from academic research.

IPN has its own technological infrastructures of six laboratories, besides accessing a network of researchers in the scientific and technological field, particularly through the Faculty of Sciences & Technology of Coimbra University.

Their high value added services were praised by ERMIS Project Director, Philippe Chereau, who was visibly impressed by their achievements in successful building strong links between academia and scientific networks. He expressed, “the IPN model was indeed an example to be followed” and added, “IPN’s strong success record in promoting innovation and competitiveness among the Portuguese industrial sector, is certainly a best practice to be studied by other regional territories.”