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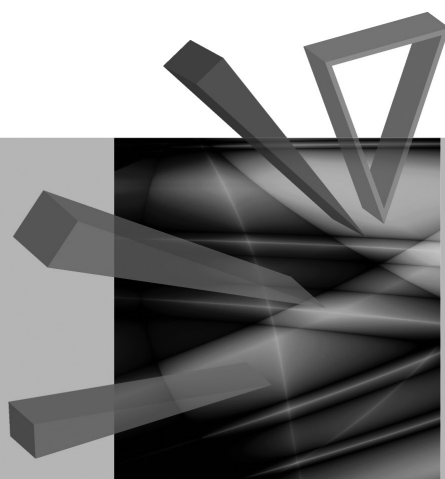
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INTERREGIONAL COOPERATION AS THE STIMULATION OF PROINNOVATION ACTIONS –THE CASUAL ANALYSIS

Summary: The subject of the article is to show the usefulness of interregional cooperation as well as the analysis of pro-innovative actions as an effect of the cooperation of the Opolskie Region and Lower Austria. Regional development depends on a good analysis of its residents' needs connected with the effective use of resources of the region. The Opolskie Region's self-government's actions are a specific kind of the use of best practice. These practices positively affected the SME's sector and tightened cooperation with the partnership region. The undertaken action has brought benefits for enterprises and for self-government during its operation. It will also influence SME's and the region's development in the future.

Keywords: innovation, SME's support, interregional cooperation.

1. Introduction

The subject of the new aim of European cooperation is increasing EU territorial integration as well as providing the synergy for finding joint solutions for existing problems. This is shown, among other things, in an increased trans-border competition by innovations and research and development [Koszyk-Białobrzieszka, Kisiel 2004, p. 73].

The present paper has as its aim to show the example of the actions undertaken by self-government units in different regions of the European Union as an example worth imitating for the practitioners. This kind of actions showed that between the higher and lower developed regions cooperation is possible, which brings effects for both of them.

2. Trans-border cooperation and its aims

The "trans-border cooperation" concept is understood as "every action taken together whose aim is the consolidation and further development of neighbouring

contacts between communities and territorial self-government of two or more agreeing parts, as well as concluding and signing agreements which are necessary for the realization of those intentions”.¹ Trans-border cooperation is also defined as both: neighbourhood cooperation – neighbouring border regions and international cooperation – regional and local authorities, organizations or institutions representing border territories. It is emphasized that trans-border cooperation is related not only to regional and local authorities’ acts, but also to common initiatives of enterprises, organizations and inhabitants.²

Trans-border cooperation can take its course at different levels, can have different forms and concern different aspects of socio-economic life. This can be, for example, cooperation of two communes creating a partnership called “twinning”. Common activities can be also held as the basis of agreements between neighbouring countries. Euro regions are pointed out as the most institutional form of cooperation, because they act as the base of agreements between local and regional level authorities and, in some cases, also with the participation of social and economic subjects. The aim of this kind of cooperation is the undertaking and coordination of actions profitable for both parts in the fields of economy, science, culture, education, as well as developing and facilitating contacts of their inhabitants and enterprises [Żelazko 2004, p. 23].

3. Regional cooperation inside the European Union framework

The widely understood cooperation between regions influences a number of factors. Regionalization on one side, and globalization on the other, are not without importance. The development of cooperation and closer contacts at regional level lead to the development of actions in different areas: social, cultural, economic or environment protection.

A factor favourable for cooperation between particular regions’ development is also the continual increase of regions’ significance within the European Union. Surely, this is the result of the decentralization process and the observed increase in regional awareness and activity.

The EU programme – European Transborder Cooperation – favours supporting, promoting and the realization of union projects of an international

¹ European Frame Convention about Transborder Cooperation Between Communities and Territorial Authorities, document of European Council signed on 21 May 1980 in Madrid. Poland ratified the Convention in April 1993 (Dz.U. z 1993 r., nr 61, poz. 287). The expression “communities and territorial authorities” refers to self-government units, offices and organs realized local and regional tasks and others considered for those by internal law of each country. The mentioned document state legal and structural standards of cooperation.

² European Charter of Border and Transborder Regions, published in 1981 by European Border Regions Society, changed in 1995.

character within the territory of the entire European Union.³ It has been implemented during the planning period 2007–2013 with the aid of three types of operational programmes:

- trans-border cooperation, whose aim is developing common local and regional initiatives,
- transnational cooperation, directed at European Union territorial integration by supporting accessibility, sustainable development of urban areas, innovation and environment protection,
- international cooperation, which makes possible the exchange of experiences and best practices among the other things supporting innovation and knowledge-based economy as well as environmental protection.

A legal instrument introduced by the EU law which allowed making formalized cooperation groups by public institutions from different EU countries is the European Group of Territorial Cooperation.⁴

Then supranational cooperation is recognized as one of the most effective ways of spreading the new ideas or innovative solutions. This kind of cooperation repeatedly leads EU programmes, including the European Social Fund.⁵

The unquestionable merits of international cooperation are such factors as exchanging experiences, knowledge transfer, parallel working out new solutions or jointly creating new products (for example a service), dividing tasks connected with the achievement of common aims. Also important is exchanging between partners, people who realise the projects or who take part in the projects as well as dividing the costs of producing the common product.

4. Pro-innovation actions in cooperation between regions – the Opolskie Province case study

The actions undertaken by the self-government of the Opolskie Province as the result of supranational cooperation have turned into concrete programmes directed to defined sectors of enterprises – that is to the small and medium enterprises sector. So directed stream of actions underlines the range of the mentioned sector for the regional economy as well as allowing to find that self-government

³ It is the continuation of trans-border, trans-national and international cooperation programmes realized in the framework of Common Initiative INTERREG III 2004–2006.

⁴ Ruling of European Parliament and Council no. 1082/2006 from 5 June 2006 on the matter of European Group of Territorial Cooperation. Admittedly, the ruling does not have a binding character and is not directly obligatory legal act but article 16 puts into force the duty of establishing by member countries regulations which will effectively provide when using this regulation. In the Polish legal system the legal basis of this kind of cooperation is the Act dated 27 November 2008 about the European Group of Territorial Cooperation (Dz.U. z 2008, nr 218, poz. 1390 z późn. zm.).

⁵ <http://www.equal.org.pl/spolecznosc.php?CID=3&lang=pl> (date of access: 28.08.2012).

(regional) authorities have made a conscious choice of the direction of the actions, and the subject of their interest are the real problems of the regional economy. Stimulated sector, which has got the biggest influence at regional development, is the endogenic factor of development and simultaneously creates opportunity of new work places (self-employment) for local inhabitants.

The area of agreement between partners establishing supranational cooperation can be: the realization of a common subject, a similar kind of organization, a similar kind of problem, an action undertaken in favour of a similar target group. All the mentioned factors should be together taken into consideration when planning and looking for a partner from another member country.

The partner of the analysed project is Lower Austria, being the European leader in adapting regional policy of innovations.⁶

The actions provided at present by the Lower Austria region are concentrated on strengthening the innovation's leader position as well as spreading of the regional system of innovation model as the standard model (European benchmark). Cooperation with the Opolskie Province enters into the realization of the above mentioned strategy assumptions- Lower Austria agreed to support the Opolskie Province as the partner fulfilling the role of an "expert", targeting permanent cooperation in the field of adapting the Regional Innovation System.

In the project realized by the regions, Lower Austria is the partner being both adviser" and expert in the range of the programme's "Technology & Innovation Partner Coaching Methodology" adaptation process into the Opolskie Province as well as making and adapting an effective regional system of innovation.⁷

"Technology & Innovation Partner Coaching Methodology" is the methodology adopted since 1979, being one of the pillars of the regional system of innovation in Lower Austria. The methodology is based on proactive approach and relies on that in the so-called "Technology & Innovation Partner" – in the Opolskie Province the "Innovation Partner" meets the opposite enterprise's needs which are defined by direct contact. After defining the enterprise's needs, the Innovation Partner gives information about services accessible in the region which are provided by public and private institutions, as well as helps to indicate a concrete partner or partners who will support the enterprise in realizing an innovative action. As a result those institutions raise the supported enterprises' innovation level.

Innovation Partners are in constant contact with both regional "services providers" and enterprises acting as a "go-between".

⁶ This fact is confirmed by the acquired prizes:

- "The Award of Excellence for Innovative Regions" – European Commission,
- "Award for Europe's most innovative Region – Assembly of European Regions,
- Regio Stars Awards – for the programme "Innovation Assistant".

⁷ http://oris.opolskie.pl/projekt_oris/273_14_dolna-austria-partner-projektu.html (date of access: 28.08.2012).

Actions undertaken by Innovation Partners also involve organizing specialist workshops for enterprises – subjects are adapted to the needs of enterprises which are recognized during visits in these enterprises.⁸

The first stage of cooperation (from April 2009 to March 2010) was realized within the framework of the international project entitled “Opening Regional Innovation System in the Opolskie Voivodeship (ORIS)”. The institution which was responsible for the project at the Opolskie Province’s side was the Opolskie Center of Economy Development. The project’s aim was creating an effective Regional Innovation System in the Opolskie Province by opening up international cooperation and using knowledge, best practices as well as the experiences of its partner region – Lower Austria.

One of the project’s elements was a pilot adaptation of an Austrian programme entitled “Innovation Assistant” into the Opolskie Province. The programme aims at strengthening the cooperation between science and business.⁹

To realize the above mentioned goal, 13 persons were chosen from among scientists (doctoral students and doctors from the range of sciences, applied science or economy) from the Opolskie Province’s academies during a period of three months, as “innovation assistants” in the enterprises embraced by the pilot scheme. The effect of this action is shown in Table 1.

On the basis of the above data it is possible to state that the suggested innovative solutions concern different fields of science as well as a wide range of enterprises. For example, for the enterprise dealing with production, a solution was suggested of work ergonomics, but for the food company – the solutions concerned the investment activity. There are significant divergences between the branch of the company and the field of the innovative solution – these divergences attest to the real diagnosis and define the needs of the enterprise as well as the real opportunities of putting the suggested solutions into practice. The data states that the project showed also an equality of opportunities and the gender equality between the 6 women and 7 men participating in the project.

The next stage of the interregional cooperation based on best practice was a continuation of the ORIS programme under the ORIS II¹⁰ name (from April 2010 to March 2012). The project was aimed at the continuation of the opening of the Regional Innovation System in the Opolskie Province and implementing best practice in the Regional Innovation Strategy (RSI) of European Union regions. Its practical dimension is an adaptation of Lower Austria’s best practise called

⁸ http://oris.opolskie.pl/projekt_oris/273_15_na-czym-polega-austriacki-program.html (date of access: 28.08.2012).

⁹ http://ocrg.opolskie.pl/a/174/Projekt_ponadnarodowy_ORIS (date of access: 27.08.2012).

¹⁰ Project called “ORIS II” realised by Opolskie Center of Economy Development was co-financed from Human Capital Operational Programme’s funds in frames of activity 8.2.2 “Regional Strategies of Innovation”.

Table 1. Realization of the pilot scheme in the “Innovation Assistant” programme made within the ORIS programme framework in the Opolskie Province

Sector of enterprise participating in programme	Domain of suggested innovative solution	Suggested innovative solutions	Gender of Innovation Assistant
Industrial chemistry – production, research and development	Organic chemistry – research and development	Organization of chemical technological incubator based on unused part of infrastructure in the aim of organization the administrative, research and development background, laboratories and offices used for realization of the Project in research and development fields as well as commercialization of processed solution	M
Installment and service of industrial energy equipment	Automation and robotics	Automation and robotics of installment of thermal boiler works – reduction of work runtime and decrease of expenditure of energy and protective gas	M
Thermal energy – produce, sending, distribution	Energetics /ecology	Building of associated system adapter for biomass burning in the process of directing burning with coal. Solution will allow simultaneous production of warmth and electricity	F
Installment of power lines	Information technologies	Using GPRS/GSME technology for creation of new service in frames of leading activity. Start-up of private access point of APN access and supplying of service related with creation of safe client network for data transmission and adapting the service of data hosting	M
Production of electronic and electrotechnical equipment for motor industry	Electromechanics	Production of engine steering raising the research and development capability of the enterprise. Building own steering for whole system of steering of a Diesel engine – widening the company’s product range improvement of research and development process, reduction of time and cost of carrying out tests; correction of offered products’ quality	M
Plants’ production	Irrigation technologies	Applying modern automatic systems of the irrigation with help of dropping and of capillaries - reducing consuming water and lowering the risk of the transfer operation of fungal diseases. Installation will save from generating in the warm weather more energy-efficient and ecological	F
Production and adornment of ceramics and Glass	Technologies of heating and production	Modernization of stoves for ceramics by applying the process of cooling a furnace chamber and methods of the recycling of the warmth; improvement in the technology of decorating by buying the new machine to the screen printing. Shortening the production time, removal expenses of the individual product and the protection of the natural environment	F
Processing of poultry	Heating technologies	Thermal application of the system based on using biomass	M
Diagnostics and mechanics of about all-out mass for 3.5 t cars	Car mechanics	Innovative method of the exchange of draught-proofing of engine - introduction of a new technology of repair without the need for the disassembly of the engine	M
Tele-information and net services	Information technologies	Drawing up applications of the so-called technology Building Management System (BMS) will allow for more effective comprehensive buildings management	M
Production of nutrient for children and infants	Investments management	New practice rules of supporting the planning system and of organizing the investment activity	F
Buildings thermo-modernization	Ergonomics and efficiency of work	The new solutions concerning the work study in the destination of shortening the time of the installation process	F
Installment and modernization of energy installation	Ergonomics and efficiency of work	Implementing the long-term plan of training in raising the ability of employees and of applying the measurement and control modern tools	F

Source: own elaboration on the basis of [Projekt ponadnarodowy ORIS... 2010, pp. 4–7].

“Technology and Innovation Partner Coaching Methodology” by creating a new service called the “Innovation Partner”, creating the ORIS¹¹ Portal as the new tool supporting the regional innovation system in the Opolskie Province, and supporting experts from Lower Austria in implementing RSI.

Amongst the results of the project one should mention:

- good cooperation between scientists, B+R institutions and SMEs,
- better use of the B+R potential in the Opolskie Province,
- greater awareness of SMEs of the importance of innovation,
- transparent information system about RSI and promoting innovative companies,
- partnership between institutions involved in implementing RSI in Lower Austria and the Opolskie Province,
- implementing RSI more effectively in the Opolskie Province.

Amongst the benefits for enterprises participating in the project should be:

- simple, free of charge access to the new group of the key clients,
- getting detailed information from checking the level of customer’s satisfaction, positioning the company relating to other anonymous contractors of the same branch,
- involvement in the supranational project, aimed at developing and “opening” Regional Innovation System by the Opolskie Center of Economy Development.

5. Conclusions

To sum up the considerations on the subject of cooperation taken by the Opolskie Province and Lower Austria, it should be stated that the action turned out to be intentional, directed and has brought (and still will be bringing) measurable results for both the involved enterprises and regional development. The interest of entrepreneurs confirms that, and next was translated into the response of the regional authorities in the form of the announcement of the third edition of the supporting programme. Undoubtedly, this is an example of best practice and the ability of introducing, by regional authorities, solutions bringing notable effects for the development of the region.

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¹¹ www.oris.opolskie.pl.

WSPÓLPRACA MIĘDZYREGIONALNA STYMULANTEM DZIAŁAŃ PROINNOWACYJNYCH – PRZYKŁAD WOJEWÓDZTWA OPOLSKIEGO

Streszczenie: Artykuł ma na celu wykazanie celowości współpracy między regionami oraz analizę działań proinnowacyjnych wynikających ze współpracy Opolszczyzny z Dolną Austrią. Rozwój regionu zależy od umiejętnej analizy potrzeb jego mieszkańców oraz efektywnego wykorzystania posiadanych zasobów. Działania samorządu województwa opolskiego to szczególnie rodzaj stosowania dobrych praktyk, które przyczyniły się do wymiernych efektów dla sektora MŚP oraz zacieśnienia współpracy z regionem partnerskim. Podjęte działanie przyniosło korzyści zarówno dla przedsiębiorców, jak i samorządu już w jego trakcie; będzie także skutkowało rozwojem MŚP, a tym samym regionu, w przyszłości.

Słowa kluczowe: innowacje, wspieranie MŚP, współpraca międzyregionalna.