

Results from the peer reviews in the framework of the MED capitalization and clustering process



MED projects for a smarter Mediterranean region:

The contribution of web-based platforms for innovation support, knowledge and technology transfer

Background

Since the first thematic brainstorming series in summer 2011 and the Capitalization Day in Marseilles in winter 2011, a bottom-up clustering process involving all MED projects has been carried out aiming to form clusters of projects within the same thematic areas. In this way, information shall be exchanged and common innovative outputs and results shall be mainstreamed and transferred to Mediterranean territories.

So far, this process led to the identification of 4 topics and 8 clusters of projects:

Policies for Smart Growth: innovative and creative SME's

- 1) Web-based platforms for knowledge and technology transfers
- 2) Innovative services and “soft” infrastructures for innovative and creative SMEs/industries
- 3) Smart Specialisation in Rural Areas

Policies for Sustainable Urban Models and Climate Change

- 4) Sustainable urban models, urban design and economic development
- 5) Energy Efficiency, Waste management and Pollution Prevention (buildings and neighbourhoods)

Policies for Sustainable Management of Natural Risk and Resources

- 6) Governance and Adaptation Policies in Coastal Mediterranean Zone
- 7) Integrated and Sustainable management of natural areas and resource in Mediterranean Area

Policies for Sustainable Ports and Transports

- 8) Sustainable Ports, Transports and Accessibility

The cluster of MED projects on *'Policies for Smart Growth: Web-based platforms for knowledge and technology transfer'* responds to the challenge for a smart and inclusive growth faced by the Europe 2020 Strategy. The projects contribute to close the competitiveness and innovation gaps of small and medium enterprises both within and outside the Mediterranean region.

Such projects mainly aim at encouraging dissemination of innovative technologies and know-how and strengthening strategic cooperation between the public and the private sector. They set the basis of knowledge and interaction for the identification of smart specializations of the territories involved, and to find a way to cooperate and coordinate investment plans to allow the emergence of specialized and transnational clusters able to attract further R&D capacities and investments from foreign countries and to insert them in the global and Euro-Mediterranean value chains.

Who is (in) the cluster?

Participating MED projects:

- + AGRO-ENVIRONMED
- + INSMED
- + R&D Industry
- + ICS
- + MET3
- + IKTIMED
- + SMILIES

What are the cluster's main pillars?

All projects that took part in the cluster were focused at large on innovation and technology transfer and had an interest in sharing their web-based tools.

Projects' specific objectives range from supporting technology-based innovation in a specific sector (such as eco-construction or agro-food) or across a broader range of sectors (high or low tech) by providing different support services both to entrepreneurs as well as to technology intermediaries and research institutes. Some projects are targeted on less technological aspects of innovation and more concentrated on entrepreneurship development for micro and small entrepreneurs or cooperative enterprises.

All of them are characterized by a strong transnational focus and the use of web-based tools to implement foreseen activities and/or provide support services to their direct beneficiaries.

What are the outputs?

MED projects have promoted a **diverse and composite set of web-based integrated platforms**, a sort of miniature ‘**innovation portals**’ **collecting and integrating a variety** of more or less interactive **ICT instruments and tools aimed at sustaining innovation** – in its broadest meaning – for different categories of beneficiaries. In line with the project objectives, **online tools** integrated by the platforms are essentially aimed at **technology transfer** and **knowledge exchange** and range from instruments

- ➔ mapping innovative technologies,
- ➔ cataloguing innovative business opportunities,
- ➔ promoting matching requirements with technology users to social platforms that attract innovative ideas for SMEs or propose innovative services,
- ➔ promoting connections between different markets at transnational level.

They can be divided into two main groups:

1 Matchmaking tools...

... aiming to create a ‘virtual market place for innovation’ facilitating the encounter between technology users and technology producers (as well as “intermediaries”) in different sectors (matchmaking for innovation).

Examples:

INSMED’s Platform for Collaborative Intelligence

(<http://marketplace.insmed.eu/valuechain.en.html>) consists of a ‘smart’ inventory of the eco-constructions sector’s actors mapped according to their position in the value chain and divided into six categories of players. It is based on an ‘intelligent’ database that, on the basis of a common vocabulary of terms linked with each mapped actor (e.g. a coding system) **allows searching partners** according to the required needs. The platform therefore **provides a mapping of eco-construction actors and allows linking their offer with existing demand.**

MET3’s Technology Based Opportunities Marketplace: it allows the following functions:

- ➔ Find / Upload a Technology Based Opportunity;
- ➔ Express interest/receive expressions of interest in a technology;
- ➔ Link & interact with business, researchers, intermediaries.

AGROENVIRONMED’s ‘Spatial Techno-Environmental Platform’ provides direct access to the **catalogue of BAT (Best Available Technologies)** and **BEP (Best Environmental Practices)** in the Mediterranean region.

2 Interactive communities...

...for knowledge exchange: interaction can range from relatively 'simple' communities/blogs where project stakeholders and other interested parties find space for communicating on specific events or issues and through which they can disseminate news, tools, ideas to more interactive communities. They would seem to be more suitable for transferring non technological knowledge –non codified knowledge or related to 'soft' or 'hidden' innovation whose basic idea is to create a repository (a 'box') of innovative ideas and facilitating knowledge transfer through virtual interaction (and not 'simple' knowledge repository). The idea of creating virtual communities for exchange by using different social network instruments is closely linked with the concept of online communities.

SMILIES's developed a social networking platform (supported by 'ning' – a webtool for social networking) where partners, stakeholders and all interested could freely interact, share ideas and information, draw inspiration, etc.. An additional interactive feature of SMILIES website was developed by creating a reserved area for actors involved in the implementation of pilot projects linked to the pilots' database (pilot projects consisted of **ideas/projects of individual innovators or entrepreneurs** which the SMILIES project helped in developing). Backing providers could **monitor and follow up the different support activities that were provided** to the individual projects assisted by SMILIES.

ICS' Business to business online community will integrate a section where members will be able to showcase **services and products offered** according to sector of activity on which they would like to make business. This is not a catalogue of cooperatives but a catalogue of services and products. Another section will implement a service on **finding a solution**: a sort of contact form addressed to the community and managed by the moderator, which will be used to find a solution to a particular request or a set of solutions available on the business community section. The requests sent will be visible also to all the community members so that they will be able to give their information and contributions, too. A third section will be hosted: a **Knowledge community on the social economy** developed on an existing website dedicated to knowledge sharing among cooperatives (<http://www.oxalis-scop.fr/>). ICS will also develop an **e-learning platform** dedicated to train social economy workers and managers on innovative topics.

IKTIMED's Knowledge communities: One component of the project is the **setting-up of collaborative groups such as knowledge communities**. These communities aim to include business people, researchers, technologists, as well as academics who are flexible, mobile and eager to innovate in a specific sector. This will permit to boost the creation of relevant aggregation focus on those sectors taking advantage of a well-defined developing plan. It will be a **collaborative work space** for the organizations mapped and inserted in the web database

Strengths and weaknesses for Mainstreaming and Transfer

These outputs and tools show several interesting and potential features and strong points which could be capitalized in the framework of the MED Programme. Web-based platforms are ideal to promote knowledge transfer in transnational context or where actors and players are located far away from each other. They have relatively low implementation costs and, once created, require limited marginal effort to keep them running. Web-based tools are well suited to promote interdisciplinary efforts in supporting innovation – required in the early stage of small businesses development. Furthermore they represent innovative/flexible instruments (although with a high rate of ‘obsolescence’) and can be adapted and integrated when a project develops and new needs arise. Micro and small enterprises are bound to gain easier and cheaper access to knowledge and services while simultaneously making a greater use of these tools, thus increasing the demand for web-based support instruments. This will help many of them to ease obstacles deriving from their ‘peripheral’ location and to overcome access barriers to new and competitive markets.

Such valorization however needs to also take into account a series of weaknesses and threats which have emerged from the analysis. The clustering process and other capitalization activities may have an important role in addressing these aspects, namely:

- Lack of evidence as to the effectiveness of these platforms and particularly of its instruments/services;
- Support tools – as successful and effective they could be – need to be backed by **human interaction**. Especially when it comes to knowledge exchange and technology transfer or even commercialization of such technologies nothing can replace human interaction. As such, platforms need to be used **in parallel to other face-to-face activities of knowledge and technology transfer**;
- Problem of platform’s sustainability and maintenance once the project ends;
- Lack of communication among platforms might lead to overlapping and repetition of similar activities and tasks among the different projects and therefore lack of efficiency
- Limited ‘size’ of the initiatives which are related to single projects and therefore do not reach a minimum ‘critical mass’ to be able to function effectively within the broader and complex panorama of web-based platforms for innovation.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of all web-based instruments aimed at networking and knowledge exchange depends on the capacity of projects **to selectively attract and actively involve users**, including also ‘filtering’ information and contacts made through forums, networks and collaborative communities. This is becoming more and more difficult due to the widespread use of web-based media and tools which increase ‘competition’ among the different platforms.

What about the future: a MED portal for innovation?

Capitalization of web-based tools should be integrated in the project design and realized from its very first project phase in connection and interoperability with other projects' web-based tools. This could be done by envisaging a **MED Portal for Innovation and Knowledge Transfer** gathering the different platforms developed by the projects. To this end, projects could be requested to construct these tools since the beginning according to compatible parameters and designed in conformity with compatible ICT languages and structures/architectures. The portal could become a sort of a first point of entry for micro and SMEs interested in accessing services to develop their ideas.

The projects' experiences demonstrate that the type of innovation which is needed by micro and small entrepreneurs can be reached by working across boundaries to link ideas and businesses. This is a kind of innovation that focuses less on a patent or a product but rather on social creativity. Thus the portal could become a place for gathering and giving visibility to regional assets comprising both 'soft' and 'hard' innovation assets/resources.

The platform could have different functions such as:

- a repository of outputs (regional innovation profiles, areas of excellence);
- interactive catalogues/matchmaking services for technology based opportunities, business/investment opportunities and services provided innovative enterprises;
- capacity building tools (e-learning);
- interactive communities for knowledge exchange and transfer – also making use of networking instrument such as social networks.

The main advantage of a 'MED wide' platform is that it could reach a 'critical mass' and become the 'entry point' to a wide range of innovation services for MED entrepreneurs and innovation actors. It could become a gateway for the promotion of the innovation and investment potential of the MED region. At the same time the platform should strive to increase collaboration and integration with EU-wide innovation portals such Europe Innova (www.europe-innova.eu) and within these portals with specific tools for supporting knowledge transfer and matchmaking. See for example the 'takeitup initiative' (www.takeitup.eu) tailoring support tools to the needs of companies and accelerating their uptake in the regions.

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE MED
CLUSTERING PROCESS AND CAPITALIZATION AT:

www.programmemed.eu

MED PROJECTS' RESULTS LIBRARY SOON
AVAILABLE AT:

www.programmemed.eu/results

Join us also on:



The flyer resumes the results of the capitalization process sustained by the MED Programme and implemented by CeSPI (Centro Studi di Politica Internazionale) and Institut de la Méditerranée (IM) through case study analysis and peer reviews meetings. CeSPI/IM thank all the projects for their active participation.