



ICHNOS PLUS Innovation and Change: Network of One-stop Shops Business – PLUS

The project [ICHNOS PLUS](#), funded under [INTERREG IVC](#) programme, aims to build on the achievements of the INTERREG III C project entitled “ICHNOS: Innovation and CHange – Network of One-Stop Shops”, concluded in April 2007, that produced a **model of Regional Centre of Competence (RCC) for One-Stop Shops for business (OSS)**.

To start-up a new business, an entrepreneur undertakes a wide range of activities: developing a business plan; obtaining financial resources; registering the business entity; and obtaining any mandatory sector or activity specific licences. A survey (2006-2007), carried out by the Observatory of European SMEs, highlighted that the most significant business constraints perceived by SMEs is the compliance with the administrative regulations.

As a **capitalisation project**, ICHNOS PLUS focuses on the **transfer and deployment of the RCC model and its mainstreaming into the regional policies through the ERDF Operational Programmes**. The RCC model has been conceived as a structure to co-ordinate one-stop shops acting as single points of contact for enterprises. Although the establishment of one-stop shops is foreseen by the EU legislation and was expected in all Member States by 2007, most regions have not accomplished yet this task.

The **partnership** is made of 6 partners: Ancitel Sardegna (Italy); CESGA Foundation: Fundación Centro Tecnológico de Supercomputación de Galicia (Spain), Vysocina Region (Czech Republic), North Aegean Region (Greece), Science & Technology Park of Tartu (Estonia) and Ruda Slaska Business Incubator (Poland).

The **main objectives** of ICHNOS PLUS are both optimising the implementation of this model in the three regions which carried out ICHNOS and promoting its effective transfer and deployment in other European regions.

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Participation in the 2nd Dissemination Conference of the project

On the 21st of September the **2nd Dissemination Conference**, as well as the **5th Steering Committee Meeting** took place at Lesvos island. In the frames of this happening, the **3rd Scientific Committee Meeting** was held as well, while on the 22nd of September the **4th On-site visit** closed that interregional meeting.

The 2nd Dissemination Conference was divided into two parts.

The first one included presentations and aspects referring to the Greek reality, as far as the functioning of OSS is concerned, the prospects for the future and the process made so far by **EBEA**, the Chamber of Commerce in Athens, having to do with simplification policies fostered, in an effort to enable business start-ups and diminish the red tape processes that cost vital time to businessmen.

An extended overview of the procedure followed by Greek businessmen for the establishment of an enterprise was presented, by **Mr Tsantakis Manolis** (Team Europe Member), who presented the exact proceeding a businessman follows in order to start up his business, in the present Greek reality, as well as the difficulties he faces in the process of establishing any kind of enterprise. The importance of **cutting red tape** for business start-ups and smooth running was pointed out, as something which could be restricted only by altering the whole administrative legislation. Having to visit so many public services and to collect so many documents from each of them, is something that forces entrepreneurs assign that time and tolerance consuming procedure to lawyers or accountants and pay them for that service, which is something completely vain, as the OSS idea can substitute this practice without any cost at all. The most important policies in this field at EU level (Small Business Act, Services Directive, etc.) and the role of regions in this context were claimed to be hopeful enough.

The **most serious problems** faced in the current **Greek reality** that were pointed out, are the following:

- A wide range of documentation needed
- Submission of the same documents to different authorities.
- Non-cooperation of different authorities
- Much time needed, till the accomplishment of all the procedures
- Time and money consuming procedures for the entrepreneurs
- Lack of legislation for the functioning of "One Stop Shops".

These problems, were underlined by the businessmen who attended the conference as well, who spoke about their

own experiences and the vital need for simplification of the procedures, in order to make the establishment of an enterprise a motivation for them and not a burden.

Mr Vardalas' (legal advisor of EBEA) presentation focused on the successful functioning of the OSS of EBEA in a pilot stage, and demonstrated the exact proceedings followed by an entrepreneur visiting that place. His analysis, as far as the idea of restricting the phenomenon of red tape and gaining useful time for entrepreneur's is concerned, was followed by a step by step demonstration of all the **activities** undertaken or potentially undertaken by the employees of the **Athens Chamber of Commerce**, which hosts the OSS spot, he described.



The **second part** had to do with the implementation of good practices of the ICHNOS Plus project by partner Regions. Representatives of each partner region, presented their own regional case, as far as the functioning of OSSs and the ICHNOS PLUS project's progress are concerned. It was a great honor for the project's committee to have among representatives of each partner region, politicians who spoke about the cases of their own regions: **Mrs Adreina Farris, minister of the Sardinia Region**, spoke about the Sardinian case and the intentions of the government, which promotes the OSS functioning in order to **diminish the red tape phenomenon**, enable business start-ups and support entrepreneurs.

More specifically, she underlined that the Sardinia Region, knows that the **efficiency of the Public Administration** is a strategic tool for the attraction of the enterprises in the territory, and thinks that the Regional Center of Competence can have a key role in the enhancement of the services provided by the OSS, something which consequently will lead to the development of the territory, especially in a time during which the EU is trying to go out from the crisis that stroke the world.

The model of RCC in Sardinia, was developed within the previous ICHNOS project and is being studied by the new partners, in order to be implemented in their regions. The Sardinia Region has already implemented various piloting phases of the project: there are about **80 OSSes**,

coordinated by a **regional board** through different tools, among which there is a coordination office which has an internet portal with about **900 operating members**.

The OSS spots are very useful, as they are supposed to answer quickly to complex questions asked by entrepreneurs. Thus they provide technical assistance simplifying various administrative actions and specific laws for enterprises.

The European Union seems to appreciate a lot the Sardinians operational system. The Sardinia Region obtained a Special Mention in the **European Enterprise Awards** the last May for its activity, as far as the coordination of OSSes is concerned. Besides, the European Commission by **Mr Inigo Urresti** from DG Enterprise invited the Region to present their model of RCC as a best practice at the European meeting of the **“National network of the Start Up coordinators”**.

They are, for the time being, in a procedure of concentrating on the formal procedures, in order to transfer this model into the Operational Programme of the region.

The Sardinia Region has already begun to operate with its own office, that partly will coordinate several functions such as **Observatory, Consultancy and Assistance, Training, Information and Communication**. Some of these functions will directly be coordinated by the Region itself, while other, will be subcontracted by external organizations. As far as the training is concerned, the Region believes on the effectiveness of self training, in the frames of which, the best OSSes pull those with greater difficulty. For this reason the Region will promote an exchange of staff programme, in order to transfer best practices on the territory.

The Region's aim, is to provide a new information technology platform to all the OSSes. Shortly, a pilot implementation is planned to get started and in the forthcoming future, all the other OSSes will get involved as well.



It was very useful to hear from the Sardinian partners, that potential entrepreneurs in the Sardinia Region can submit

their documentation electronically and have all the procedures (authorization achievement) accomplished in a short time, which almost reaches the 10 days. The same goes for the Estonian partners who have adjusted that procedure (enterprise registration) to last maximum 2 hours.

Furthermore, very important as well, was the information by the Spanish partner, that in their region, if the authorities in charge of establishing an enterprise, postpone to come up with a license for a business of sanitary interest, in about 10 days, the entrepreneur can start up and function his own business, while waiting for the permission to be given to him, afterwards.

The two members of the **Polish Parliament** who participated in the conference: Mr Grzegorz Tobiszowski and Mr Krzysztof Gadowski, both explained the policy of their parties, as well as their attitude towards simplification of the procedures followed, for a business start up.

More specifically, **Mr Tobiszowski**, who has been involved in creating and implementing the changes in the **Polish Act of Free Enterprise** in which one of the main objectives, has to do with solutions similar to the Ichnos Plus OSS idea. He presented a plan meant to be implemented in the future and specifically the step “one window”, describing that the basic purpose is to simplify the new business registration procedures via the use of Internet. These innovative practices will be applied to individual and micro-enterprises (up to 9 employees) only. Also civil partnerships will be leaded to this option. OSS in Poland will be implemented as the last step before “zero window” option scheduled for late 2011 and based 100% on the national, central IT platform used for registration, total information and all tax, social security and statistics purposes.

The **main reasons** for these radical changes planned to be applied in the Polish system of enterprise installation are:

- **inadequate effects** of the previous registration regulations considered to be business friendly,
- **bureaucracy** and administration overgrowth,
- **negative image** of the public administration blamed for slowing down the real development of the entrepreneurship,
- **urgent necessity** of creating a more friendly environment for business start ups.

Mr Gadowski has strongly supported the idea of implementing the “One-stop shop” idea in Poland and described legal circumstances, which have been slowing down this process. Polish parliament has been working on several amendments to the existing acts and regulations concerning SME development and small business registration procedures.

Mr. Gadowski focused on the new law he has been working on – the new regulations concerning the **controlling procedures** of the SME operational and financial (tax) obligations. Making these regulations more friendly to the entrepreneur, is something that requires changes in more than 60 already existing Acts. The basic aim of these new

regulations has to do with alterations in controlling operational procedures. The entrepreneur as a personality would no longer be treated as the target – only his/her business activities would be checked.

The entrepreneur will be informed about the audit control he will be experiencing, **at least 7 days** before its implementation, which must be arranged to take place only during the working hours of his enterprise, as not to affect the work of the staff. It is supposed to be performed in cooperation with the entrepreneur or his/her authorized representatives. The entrepreneur must be informed about his/her rights and obligations. In the case of a small business, a single **audit control** that lasts 2 weeks will take place. In case of medium size enterprises it will take no longer than 4 weeks. The entrepreneur will have the right to complain in case of inspection, executed in an unprofessional way.

Both members of the Polish parliament, expressed their intention to gain knowledge and the necessary 'know-how' by the other partners of the project, in order to adjust it to their own regional settings and come up with the foundation of an OSS.

INTERREG IVC – Benefits for interregional development

After two years from the beginning of the new programming 2007-2013 some remarks can be done about the impact of [INTERREG IVC](#) on the development of the involved Regions. As a result of the first call **EUR 302 millions** (23% of funds available) were allocated on the two priorities, and the 55% of these funds has been allocated to priority I **"Innovation and the knowledge economy"**.

Twelve projects focus on Entrepreneurship and SMEs, the prior field of action, as demonstrated by the relevant number of projects approved in this field. Projects encourage the interregional cooperation and exchange of good practices, improving, supporting and promoting policies on support of new sectors of growth, and increase their effectiveness.



ICHNOS PLUS is one of these projects, and its action is aligned to the programme's expectations and objectives: stimulate policies and models to support entrepreneurship. Projects approved *on Innovation, research and technology development* field focus their action on particular sectors of entrepreneurship and innovation. Their impact on interregional development is guaranteed by **transferring good practices** and stimulating political authorities to use,

disseminate and uptake of innovations and new technologies.

Projects in the other two fields of action, *Employment, human capital and education*, and *Information Society*, are less numerous. However, benefits of their action are substantial, as demonstrated by the expected goals on political support to new social structure, employment and gender equity, in line with the [new Lisbon Strategy](#).

Last but not least, priority 2 **"Environment & risk prevention"** takes the **45% of allocated funds**. Major fields of actions are *Energy and sustainable transport* and *Natural and technological risks; climate change*, while there are just four approved projects under *Cultural heritage and landscape* and *Biodiversity and preservation of natural heritage; air quality*.

The **impact** of the above mentioned project actions deals with the comparison, evaluation and analysis of regional policies and strategies on energy (specially renewable energy); climate changes; eco-sustainable development; air and water pollution; and moreover interregional support policies to handicrafts, as specific cultural heritage.

An important aspect of INTERREG IVC projects is the growing **involvement of regional authorities** in all these actions, and not just because they are partners of the projects, but even more because plenty of time they are key-actors responsible for the reduction of regional disparities.

Then, INTERREG IVC contributes to the general **growth of the involved regions**, reducing disparities between them and stimulating their improvement in wide sectors. A special mention goes to **capitalization projects**, as ICHNOS PLUS, that contribute to transfer good practices and results of previous projects into Operational Programmes of EU Structural Funds in each participating region.

This kind of continuity between projects and, in this case, even EU programming is an important strength of the INTERREG IVC programme, that hopefully will continue in the next future.

How ICT can support business development

To promote the creation of companies within a region, first of all, there have to be potential entrepreneurs: people with ideas and energy, both of which are essential when deciding to start one's own company. Nevertheless, the mere existence of entrepreneurs is not sufficient in itself, and a supportive environment for ideas to flourish is also essential. Also we must not forget about **eGovernment and ICTs** that have become privileged tools for companies, and more specifically, for entrepreneurs, as they allow them to access to a series of services which permit the start-up of companies in a **faster, less expensive** manner. For this reason the EU is promoting this as a necessary element to make Europe a more attractive place for investment and work, where knowledge and innovation drive growth and expansion.

According to the **i2010 action plan**, which is based upon the premise that efficient government is a necessary condition for competitiveness and innovation, e-government must reach a degree of development which will allow European citizens and entrepreneurs to benefit from the so-called **interoperable electronic identity management**. This means that if a citizen or a company wishes to travel or establish themselves in another country, which is a member of the European Union, then the access to public services such as health services, business support, electronic vote, etc, is guaranteed, safeguarding **data privacy**.

In this regard **eIDM** (Electronic IDentity Management) and **Digital Signature** are of special importance as tools for identifying users (citizens or companies) and signing documents across Europe. They create electronic identity management based upon the interoperability and the mutual recognition of eIDM by each Member State. eIDM provides an opportunity which cannot be missed for companies as it allows authenticated access to public services, which is practical, secure and interoperable throughout the EU. The Member States recognise the importance of the role of eIDM and Digital signature for ensuring that by 2010 citizens and businesses alike.

Setting up a virtual contact point in Tartu region (Estonia)

Stakeholders in Tartu region have decided to set-up a virtual regional contact point for entrepreneurs. Tartu Science Park and other regional business support organisations (such as Business Development Department of Tartu City Government, Tartu Business Advisory, Chamber of Commerce) are working together on the concept of **Tartu Regional Business Portal**. The idea is to gather essential information for businesses on a single website. The portal would provide information about starting a business, required procedures, licenses, financing etc. The website would also direct entrepreneurs to the websites of business support organisations.

Currently, it is difficult for entrepreneurs to find all relevant websites and learn about regional system of business support. Tartu Science Park is also working together with State authorities such as the **Centre of Registers and Information Systems (CRIS)**. CRIS operates central commercial register where it is possible to register a company within **2 hours** (confirmed record is 18 minutes) over the internet. The planned web-portal would promote state level e-solutions for businesses.

Plans for establishing RCC in Silesia Region (Poland)

The Ruda Slaska Business Incubator at present is working on the developing conception of the Regional Center of Competence in the Silesian Region (Poland). Thanks to the

Toolkit, the manual guide for the implementation of the good practices drawn up as a part of the project, the incubator has chosen his own model of RCC, to be implemented in Silesia.

In Poland, only the national government is undertaking decisions about the functioning of one-stop-shops. **One-stop-shop** currently takes care only of registering the business activity and mediating between the Tax Office and Social Insurance Office. There isn't a component of advises for enterprises, because such advises are provided by the consulting centers, business incubators, chambers of commerce etc. There are plans to create RCC in Silesia under the project, which would provide **advisory and training services** for start-up and entrepreneurs, especially for OSS employees. As a result, start-up will be able to simultaneously register the company and obtain all necessary information about the business activity. Realization of this task will be possible thanks to the funds obtained from the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

How can project cooperation continue after the project end

The most important added value for all the project partners is the creation of the expertise network among the project consortium. Members of the regional project teams as well as the Scientific Committee members have been working together for about two years. So there are two main possibilities on how the cooperation can sustain for the future:

- a creation of the **informal advisory network** of specialists for solving the regional problems with implementation and running the RCC model. This group will work to help the partner region to stay in touch for the future and monitor and advice them all possible issues coming from the RCC model implementation into practice. Although there will be no official project for the period of operating the regional RCC model cases, partners should help each other as the knowledge based network. There is a strong willingness to run such an internal network.
- A creation of the **official advisory group** to inform the other regions about the project idea, results and progress. A single webpage could be produced to enable other regions contact the RCC model experts with questions or comments. It could be a Facebook site or other social network site to be easily implemented and updated.

On the other hand the ICHNOS Plus project idea is developed for more than four years so project partners will try to find ways on how to cooperate as a real project team in the future as well.

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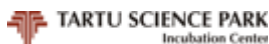
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