

Introduction

The Project “Mentoring European Knowledge of the Chemical Regions” (MentorChem) is a cooperation between the regions Saxony-Anhalt, Lombardia and Asturias in the framework of the pilot action “**Regions of Knowledge**” supported by the European Commission GD Research. The main aim of the action is to demonstrate the central role of knowledge in driving regional development and how regional actors can effectively participate in formulating their regions future. Furthermore, it is the objective to increase collaboration on a transnational / transregional basis to enable learning between European regions and the identification of models and activities that can be implemented in different regions. The **partnership** consists of the isw Gesellschaft für wissenschaftliche Beratung und Dienstleistung mbH (www.isw-gmbh.de) from Saxony-Anhalt as the coordinator, IDEPA (Asturias) - Instituto de Desarrollo Económico del Principado de Asturias (www.idepa.es) and Cestec SpA – Centro Lombardo per lo Sviluppo Tecnologico e Produttivo dell’Artigianato e delle Piccole Imprese (www.cestec.it) from Lombardia.

The three regions are at different **stages of development** and with different experiences in the area of research and regional policy. Therefore, they have been specifically selected to join together in a project of “Knowledge Regions”, being a representative panel of the European economic landscape, due to their complementary differentials and a common sector of evolution such as the chemistry, which is an important component of the regional socio-economic structure and the innovation system.

The **chemical industry** is still one of the key sectors in Europe in terms of employment, turnover and research and development. It has a central importance for the European Research Area, the evolution of an innovative regional policy and knowledge based economy and it is a strong growth factor for the European economy. The project MentorChem addresses the present challenges of the chemical industry, such as the increasing globalisation, the restructuring of traditional branches and the demands for an environmental and sustainable development. The project allows the regions to support the implementation of a EU Chemical policy, a sound economic environment and the ERA in the regions.

The **cooperation approach** of the project emphasize an innovative-pragmatic mentoring model, which is based on a classic approach of identifying the weaknesses-needs of disadvantaged vs. developed regions and the exchange & modelling of best-practices. As a result, joint solutions for the transfer of innovative policy instruments will be discussed and possible options for the future should be highlighted. Finally, the results should be examined in view of maximizing the opportunities for the mainstream structural funds and research policy .

The focus of the work are three **thematic priorities**, which will be further developed in the course of the project:

- 1. Restructuring and development of old industrial sites and chemical sites,**
- 2. Development and strengthening of cluster structures for the support of innovation and**
- 3. Innovative Approaches for the development of human resources.**

In quarterly organized workshops the project partners will discuss the progress of the work and exchange their experience in the different selected topics to further specify the knowledge that can be useful for the transfer between the regions. It is the objective to involve a maximum number of relevant actors for the dissemination of the results. Therefore, an internet page has been developed (www.mentorchem.net) and a newsletter will be published. A final conference will present the general results of the project to a wider public. A special focus will be given to the constant information exchange with the European Chemical Regions Network, a network which is composed by approximately 20 chemical regions from all over Europe. This should ensure a transfer of results also to other regions in particularly to the regions in the new member states.

In conclusion, the mentoring process of the project will enable a stronger knowledge networking among the regions towards a common advance – from mature into enhanced chemistry - strengthening the validity of the EU cooperative model in the challenging global competition.

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