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Purpose

Regional authorities in Greece have little power in terms of making policy decisions and the central government is doing strategic planning for the whole country. The only instrument that can be used by regional authorities is the Regional Development Plan under the Community Support Frameworks. That was the main reason why the regional authorities in Central Macedonia decided to organize and implement a regional foresight exercise that would help them identify the most important priorities that need to be promoted under the forthcoming 4th Community Support Framework.

Need for Action at Regional Level

The region of Central Macedonia is the second largest urban area - the first one being Attica - of Greece. There is a high growth rate of the population and relatively high unemployment while the living standards are above the national average. As in most urban centers, Attica and Central Macedonia are the home of most decision-making centers. The most important industries and the mostly skilled and highly educated human resources are established in the region. The main issue in question for the region is the identification of ways to improve the quality of life, the socio-economic conditions, the decrease of unemployment, and the strategic development of policy measures for the promotion of R&D and innovation activities that will enhance the region's competitiveness.

The main policy instrument for facing these problems and challenges at regional level – as in Greece regional authorities have limited responsibilities in terms of strategic planning – is the Regional Development Plan. For this reason the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki proposed to implement a technology foresight exercise in Central Macedonia, for the strategic

development and planning of the forthcoming Community Support Framework Programme (CSF). In close collaboration with the regional authorities the University of Thessaloniki set up the basic elements for the project, preparing a proposal for funding in the framework of Innovative Actions of the European Regional Development Fund. This was submitted to the European Commission by the region of Central Macedonia in May 2001, under the title “Excellence in Central Macedonia 2002-2003”.

Under this scope, the Technology Foresight in Central Macedonia was initiated as an effort to identify the long-term trends for the development of specific thematic fields, with the aim to define priorities for the support of the regional innovation system and the amendment of the Regional Development Plan - under the 3rd CSF – as well as the development of the Regional Development Plan under the 4th CSF.

The foresight exercise was undertaken by the Research Committee of the University of Thessaloniki, which had already been involved in many activities of the regional innovation system. The coordination committee set as its goal “the identification of potential paths towards the development of the re-



gional innovation system in Central Macedonia and the provision of information to all involved parties in order to choose the most promising one”.

More than 70 scientists and researchers from the region collaborated closely for 18 months in the framework of this exercise. They examined the technological developments as a result of the scientific progress, assessing at the same time the effects in the citizens' everyday life.

The researchers constantly exchanged information and gave answers to the following questions:

- Which are the necessary technologies by 2018 for achieving the best possible results in terms of economic prosperity and competitiveness?
- Which are the major changes necessary in the innovation system that will contribute to this objective?
- How is the environment for these activities foreseen to change?

After the analysis of the strong and weak point, the opportunities and threats - SWOT analysis - that were implemented by the technical consultant (Logotech S.A.), two **horizontal issues** were set: **Human resources and South-eastern Europe and its economic development**, and six **thematic ones** that were considered as the most critical ones for the regional foresight in Central Macedonia:

- **Information technologies and telecommunications,**
- **Agro-biotechnologies,**
- **Environment,**
- **Energy,**
- **Transport,**
- **Materials, nanotechnologies, industrial technologies.**

Potential Users and Beneficiaries

The exercise was organised - as already mentioned - in order to identify and accordingly promote the main priorities for planning the future in the region of Central Macedonia. As regional authorities in Greece do not have policy making authorisation other than the Regional Development Plan (RDP), Central Macedonia authorities in collaboration with the local university decided to utilise foresight in order to develop and organise the forthcoming RDP based on the main research and technological priorities identified.

So, the main users of this exercise's results were the Regional authorities, the local University, the technology institutes and organisations established in the region - e.g. the Thessaloniki Science and Technology Park, the Business Incubator - the industrial and business associations as well as individual enterprises.

Skills and Competences from Past Foresight Experiences

This foresight exercise was the first one performed at regional level in Greece. The foresight experience in Greece is anyway limited so in order to organise the regional foresight exercise in Central Macedonia it was necessary to identify people with skills and competences that would promote the objectives of the exercise. For this reason, the experiences already gained by the National Foresight programme were brought in and similar methods and techniques were utilised for the implementation of the exercise. Many of the experts involved in the national programme were also invited to participate in the Central Macedonia Regional Foresight.

Some of the additional qualities and skills necessary for the exercise implementation were identified as soon as the specific areas / sectors were selected to be covered by the exercise. Through a call for expression of interest experts from these sectors were asked to participate in the thematic panels.

Communication throughout the Study

Communication was one of the most important issues when this exercise was designed. In order to achieve good communication between the thematic groups, the Steering Committee and all interested stakeholders met regularly, there were mailing lists and a working space on the project website and a newsletter with contributions and news from all thematic groups.

Keeping Participants Motivated

In order to keep participants both aware and motivated there were some efforts to advertise the exercise through the local papers and the web. This helped to emphasise the need - in terms of usefulness - for undertaking this exercise and the potential impacts and benefits that would be the outputs.

The stakeholders involved in the expert panels were chosen through a participatory approach - an open call for expressing interest - and as their involvement was volunteering, it was easy to keep them interested.

Only the members of the Steering Committee and the Chairpersons of the thematic panels were to participate in all working sessions while the participation of the rest of the panel members was more flexible.

Assessing Previous and Existing Work

The Technology Foresight Exercise in Central Macedonia was essentially the first to take place in Greece at regional level. The main studies / literature reviewed in the framework of the project were innovation strategy studies / policies implemented mainly at regional level.

Building Support

The regional authorities in Central Macedonia and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki underlined their commitment

for the elaboration of the exercise from the very beginning. They developed the methodological framework and hired an external technical consultant for the implementation of specific actions – i.e. the elaboration of the SWOT analysis for the future development of the regional policy. Furthermore, they organised workshops and information days inviting well known experts to present their work and experience in order to promote the foresight culture, which was pretty much unknown, especially at regional level. Finally, the formulation of the expert panels by selection of individuals, who expressed their interest in the open call that was published in the local press and the web.

Selecting Methods

As soon as the Research Committee of the Aristotle University started the exercise, the first action was to develop the necessary structure for the implementation of the exercise. The Co-ordination Committee was developed, consisting of the responsible person for science and a representative of the Research Committee of the University. The Research Committee of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki provided resources and personnel for the development of a website for the exercise and its applications. Finally, a technical consultancy company was hired for assisting the exercise processes.

The technical consultant was responsible for the implementation of the SWOT analysis method and the identification of the main thematic and horizontal areas to be covered. The SWOT analysis also examined issues like: the role of regional foresight in Greece and the wider region of South Eastern Europe, **employment**, the size and structure of production in the **primary, secondary and tertiary sector**, the penetration of **local enterprises in neighbouring countries**, the research potential, the **entrepreneurial potential**, the **investment in R&D** and the general strategic priorities in the Region as presented in the Regional Operational Plan for Central Macedonia in order to define the most important fields to be examined.

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis concerning the role of technology in each of the thematic fields, society, environment, economy and policy, a “basic text” was developed with a time horizon 2004-2018.

Based on the SWOT and the fundamental questions that were identified for each thematic field, the coordinators selected the main axis upon which the **Delphi** statements were developed. The use of the Delphi method was pre-determined by the call under the programme “Excellence in Central Macedonia”. Delphi is a knowledge acquisition tool. The six thematic panels proposed the statements. The technical consultant evaluated these statements and finalised eight Delphi questionnaires, which included 215 statements. The questionnaire was online and there were two rounds that were completed within two months time.

Identifying and Selecting Participants

For the selection of the participants and coordinators of the **thematic panels** there was an open invitation published in the local and national press in order to attract attention of relevant stakeholders. There were 120 candidatures mainly from the Aristotle University and the private sector.

The main criteria for the selection were:

- Broad knowledge of recent developments in the specific field,
- In depth knowledge of a sub-issue of the thematic field,
- Wide acceptance of the specific person by peers in the academic, research and industrial fields,
- Involvement in competitive R&D projects in the specific thematic field.

Tangible Outputs

The final report of the project gave a synthesis and a conclusion of the six thematic panels that were set up for discussing the various scenarios. The report included information about the current situation in these areas and the prospective developments for the time horizon set to 2018 for this exercise. There were also some suggestions in terms of policy measures for the region.

Intangible Outputs

As there were many stakeholders like the private sector, NGOs, professional associations, professional chambers, industrialists, consultants, researchers the interactivity and the synergies that were developed during the meetings / workshops of the expert panels were many and through them the thematic essays developed were of high quality. Networking between regional entrepreneurs and academia / research organisations were other intangible assets of the regional foresight exercise.

Promoting the Exercise

Making the people aware of the exercise communications was considered a vital element of the foresight exercise and the ‘promotion/marketing’ strategy was given a central place in the exercise both in terms of engaging policy-makers, stakeholders and the public.

The main tools used were:

- Information / awareness days
- The working space in the exercise website and the exchange of information and experiences through the online forum.

Positioning in the Policy Cycle

This exercise was initiated in order to pinpoint the most important research and scientific fields that are expected to play an important role in the development of the region until 2018. These areas were selected by the Research Committee of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the technical consultant with the performance of a SWOT analysis of the region. The thematic areas were discussed by specific panels that were formed after an open call that was published in the local press, in the framework of the scenarios that were developed in the National Foresight programme and also in the framework of two horizontal issues that were considered of major importance for the future development of the region.

The conclusions and suggestions that came out from the discussions of the thematic panels are meant to be used as a basis for the amendment of the Regional Development Plan under the 3rd Community Support Framework and the development of the new one - under the 4th Community Support Framework - by the regional authorities in Central Macedonia.

Disseminating Foresight Practice

In April 2003, an information day was organised in order to present the idea of the exercise, the types of methods that can be implemented and the potential results that may come out. Addressees were all stakeholders involved as well as the public. The information day was organised in the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and there was an open invitation published in the media - local and national newspapers - for anyone interested to attend.

In this information day many experts in foresight, both from Greece and the EU were invited as speakers in order to explain the concept of a foresight exercise, to present specific cases and their results and indicate potential impacts of such an exercise at regional level. As this was the first exercise to be performed at regional level in Greece, this was a valuable introduction to the various foresight methods and their potential results.

Sources and References

<http://foresight.rc.auth.gr/sitepages/MainPage/default.aspx>

About the EFMN: Policy Professionals dealing with RTD, Innovation and Economic Development increasingly recognize a need to base decisions on broadly based participative processes of deliberation and consultation with stakeholders. One of the most important tools they apply is FORESIGHT. The EFMN or European Foresight Monitoring Network supports policy professionals by monitoring and analyzing Foresight activities in the European Union, its neighbours and the world. The EFMN helps those involved in policy development to stay up to date on current practice in Foresight. It helps them to tap into a network of know-how and experience on issues related to the day to day design, management and execution of Foresight and Foresight related processes.