RESEARCH AND INNOVATION AND THEIR SUPPORTING POLES

CERCETAREA ŞI INOVAREA ŞI POLII LOR DE SUSȚINERE

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Abstract:*More than in other industries, research and innovation can not perform chaotically, but on the basis of strategic planning that takes into account the pursued goals, priorities, real opportunities and resources.*
Development - in the Western Region – of an innovation strategy is a necessary step and a prerequisite for a well-defined and coordinated activity.
Our investigation aims to analyze how its implementation and financing has been evolving, since its launch two years ago.
Conclusions of the investigations can become very relevant at the macro level, given the fact that, in our view, applied research and innovation must be decentralized to regional and local level.

Key words: *research, innovation, funds, decentralization, strategy*

INTRODUCTION

Through the efforts of West Regional Development Agency (RDA) it was developed and implemented an Innovation Strategy on the 2009-2013 timeframe.

It was conducted based on a broad consultation with key stakeholders in research area.

A recent analisys of its implementation stage revealed some interesting aspects.

They may be parts of an adaptation to nationally and internationally trends and developments, especially in the difficult economic context which the society crosses.

In addition to this, in a time when resources to support research and innovation are more precarious, their use should be oriented towards priority areas and for an increased efficiency of each investment.

The case study is particularly relevant as it was done in a region with a potential above the national average.

Thus, its findings can be extrapolated without reservation to research and innovation across our country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The analysis is based on Regional Innovation Strategy for 2009-2013, prepared under the coordination of ADR in the past years, involving the main actors in the field.

It includes a series of personal observations of one of the authors made as a direct participant in the preparation of this document, but also an adviser to the National Authority for Scientific Research - NASR.

Position from which - working within the Intermediate Body for Research - he has proposed linking the objectives of this strategic document on the main directions of domestic and international financing.

Also, one of the authors' direct involvement in monitoring of R & D and Innovation projects (CDI) funded by European funds, has allowed a detailed knowledge of the problems facing this area of activity in the West Region.

Equally, the monitoring activities could be pursued in detail, CDI activities that have benefited from EU financial support, looking at how they meet the goals and objectives for which the European Union - EU has allocates these important resources.

Moreover, also the monitoring report on implementation of Regional Innovation Strategy has based part of the support and feedback on the data provided by Intermediate Body of the NASR.

Thus, in addition to the ADR surveys, the report also has a substantial factual support, as it was built based on updates on CDI projects financed from European funds in West region.

Under these conditions, our observations are strongly objective as they come from inside the reviewed system and they are based on real data.

RESULTS AND DISCUTIONS

The current Regional Innovation Strategy (Research Innovation Strategy - RIS) has its origins in a similar strategy conducted in the period

2004-2008 and it is based on the Regional Development Plan - West Region 2007-2013

Its basic objective is to accelerate the economic development of the West Region by "integrating innovation and knowledge in public policy and current activities of the enterprises in order to increase the competitiveness of innovative products and services in the global marketplace".

This contains three strategic axes - supporting innovation infrastructure, which is generating added value in terms of products / solutions / CDI technologies, supporting innovation in enterprises sustained by their internationalization and promoting innovation culture at regional level.

If we analyze these axes (notably Axis 2) and their priorities, we will see, among others, the overlap with a number of areas for funding through the Sectoral Operational Programme "Increasing Economic Competitiveness" (SOP-IEC).

We will also see a strong concentration of human resources employed in R & D activities (over 55%) in Timis county, a fact explained by the existence here of a traditional universitary center.

Interestingly, in terms of the analysis, is that the West Region covers 3.8% of total spending on R & D activities at country level (value concentrated in 80%, in Timis county).

These spendings are allocated, in a proportion of 87.8% of the current expenditures, rather than the capital ones.

The main sources of financing such expenditures are public funds (59.8%), while supporting from the business environment is much lower.

From these, according to the same monitoring report, European funding are - at least at present - the most important categories of resources to support R & D activities (mainly through two operational programs, ROP - ROP and SOP-IEC) .

Based on these funds, have been supported to date, 25 projects submitted 19 proposals submitted on ROP and other 19 projects on Axis 2 of the SOP IEC.

Through they, the research environment has attracted almost 46 million Euros, mostly used in Timis county.

We see, therefore, that although universities work in other counties, Timis uses most of European resources.

Situation may lead in the long term, to new development gaps between counties, which will accentuate the already existing ones.

Based on these figures, they might appreciate that the goals pursued by the first axis of the RIS is made to a large extent.

Looking, however, these statistics in detail, we find that the information is just about the public research sector, while private research facilities are funded to a lesser extent and insignificantly (only three projects are in the contract).

An item worth to reveal in the context is also the existence of partnerships between business environment and public research organizations.

Although they are seen as an expression of the desire of the parties to "share" both the costs and effects / benefits of the innovative process, these collaborations - although initially in a large number - have been significantly reduced.

The main reason is the inability of firms to support on long term, their share of financing that has led, for instance, to the waiver - in various stages of projects - by five companies in the region to continue the development of some projects in partnership.

The trend is worrisome because such combinations would provide the rapid transfer of research to practice and better efficiency especially in the use of funds provided by the EU.

In addition, for this type of European funding, the competition is still open, with financial resources to support implementation of applied research into business.

Therefore, the policy makers should urgently consider the economic and legal solutions to help themselves, firms to access European funds available (including by guaranteeing loans or even part of their co-financing).

Steps that are strictly necessary in terms of starting funding operations for clusters / poles of excellence.

This is because - although they are very agreeable and interesting for business environment (in areas such as sustainable energy, nanotechnology, ICT, etc.), operations are almost inaccessible, from the point of view, for companies.

In which case, there can be serious question marks over the appropriateness and viability of such forms of association, considered - in

all countries - as vital to boost growth and thus the sustainable development at regional level.

Concerning - both in terms of research and the introduction of the new - is the low concern for firms to innovate and thus to assert, in the direction of scientific results.

The small number of start-ups and spin-offs, especially in terms of a consistent, continuous and diversified financial support from the EU, not just come from a lack of resources or potential.

We also found a weak concern for creating innovative products and activities (generally, for the creation of innovative firms).

Cause of this situation is, in my view, the persistence of weak mentality, even a lack of courage in addressing the new.

For the fact that companies prefer - especially in times of crisis - to preserve previous accumulations and avoid taking any risk, due to the conditions of an economy extremely fragile and unreliable.

Consequently, in this way is maintained (or even widening) the gap to the progress achieved at EU level.

Which can become a barrier to the internationalization of firms, either in the trade or business associations.

The monitoring report reveals, however, also a positive element that may constitute a starting point in re-thinking the supporting way, at regional level, of the innovation strategy .

Thus, almost 40% of respondents say they are willing to create a regional fund of preseed or seed type.

This means that for companies - but also for the research - there is interest in knowing the market and to test the real demand for innovative products and services.

Or, beyond the purely economic rationale supporting in this way, the implementation of RIS, it is encouraging that there is significant interest for the establishment of such regional funds (whatever their purpose).

In fact, we think this kind of social cohesion - around common objectives of local / regional - can be one of the pillars supporting the sustainable development and hence, the innovation strategy.

On this basis for social cohesion there is also another major component of RIS - culture of innovation, and creating a favorable regional economic environment favorable to new and foreign direct investment.

In our opinion, promotional events - and even dissemination, in various forms of the CDI results - does not generate, implicitly, the emergence of a culture of innovation.

They only provide better public information to the population, especially if accompanied by persuasive messages about the impact of CDI.

So, in our view, human resource is the main problem of the implementation of RIS, and not the scarcity of funds (with all the consequences arising from this issue).

Although she recorded in numerical terms, acceptable values (but unevenly distributed in the region), in qualitative terms is still deficient in certain respects.

First takes into account the mentality of them (involving psychological and motivational deficiencies), the ability to engage in major new projects, which involve potential risks and a high degree of uncertainty and instability.

The second relates to the insufficient preparation methodology and reserves manifested to the involvement in a system, of special procedures and values of research and innovation.

In fact, R & D activities are still regarded as simple everyday activities (like any others), not as a single activity, challenging, risky, full of limitations and sacrifices activity.

Finally, it is lack of professional training at the top level, super-specialized, very niche oriented.

Background to be doubled by the cultivation of practical skills, designed to make possible the transfer of theory and its rapid metamorphosis into a highly competitive economic and technical reality.

From this perspective, it is incomprehensible that the Sectoral Operational Programme "Human Resources Development (SOP HRD) has allocated almost no source of funding for future training in IDUs (including a correlation with Axis 2 of the SOP-IEC).

Progress and sustainable development - the major targets of accessing European funds - can not be achieved unless we have people well trained and motivated in peak areas (which are directly related to R & D activities).

Finally, we note that throughout the implementation of RIS - and, implicitly, by monitoring it - is not present in local government, who should

be the main actor and binder of sustainable development (reducing it only to the structure that coordinates ADR).

CONCLUSIONS

RIS monitoring report does not show up with alarmist conclusions, saying that the actual status is a reflection of the difficult economic and social context and of the degree of accessing funds.

We must take into account, however, that most projected growth scenarios and strategies for the future are oriented to an "Innovation Europe".

Or, in these conditions is important, in our view, to adapt these requirements to RIS starting right from the realities of today.

In this context it should be an independent body created to implement the strategy, including the main actors in innovation, to coordinate and link all major projects that now have EU funding.

For the fact that, by making major investments, with European support in some representative infrastructures, West Region has a chance for the first time to have some own research institutes, profiled the top areas of interest.

In addition, a number of projects is funded - including the private sector – that address to the applied research of great interest.

Therefore, we believe that the implementation of RIS must take into account these realities and integrate them into its future development, and public authorities and businesses to fully exploit them.

Horizontal cooperation is important between these structures for efficient use of leading technologies and equipment provided, by building partnerships and cooperation of specialists in various fields.

Equally important is finding additional financial resources, including the establishment of regional funds, to assist in solving specific problems of the implementation of RIS.

Sustainable development must be a continuous expression of the new searching, of solutions to ensure the rational and ecological use of resources and, above all, to contribute to improving living conditions of communities in the region.

It seems to us, in this respect, that the European funds management and correlation within a regional action plan should be done at the same level of value, by specialists, in a structure created for this purpose.

Therefore, the RIS must be integrated and linked, permanently, with the Regional Development Strategy, to meet the same goals and expectations, using the same types of resources.

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