

ENTREPRENEURIAL DISCOVERY FOCUS GROUP ON WINE IN EASTERN MACEDONIA AND THRACE

18-19 November 2014, Kouros Hotel, Drama, Greece

Overview

Organised under the aegis of the European Parliament Preparatory Action "Actual and desired state of the economic potential in regions outside the Greek capital Athens," this event focused on the wine sector in the Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (REMTh) and on selected activities which can contribute to its future development. Organised by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre in collaboration with the Managing Authority of the region, the main aims of this focus group were threefold, namely:

- To bring together relevant stakeholders in the sector, going beyond the core value chain to explore and catalyse the dynamics of the entrepreneurial process of discovery;
- To examine the key criteria to identify and pursue relevant projects for the region; and
- To refine the focus group approach for its future application to other key sectors identified under the RIS3 strategy of the region.

These aims align with one of the core activities of the preparatory action: to test and optimise the entrepreneurial discovery process (EDP) within selected sectors under the broader RIS3 strategy of the region.

Over the course of two days, the focus group meeting combined plenary and parallel sessions, with interventions by regional, national, and international experts. Within the wine sector, the following *a priori* themes for discussion were identified:

- Research and innovation focusing on technological improvements in wine;
- Research and innovation focusing on by-products of grapes and wines;
- Research and innovation related environmental sustainability and the wine sector;
- Research and innovation in wine tourism.

In the opening session, the aims and approach of the preparatory action were set out by JRC-IPTS Aiming to facilitate the refinement and implementation of the RIS3 strategy in a region heavily hit by the crisis, while also serving as a model for other convergence regions in Greece and Europe, the project centres on the provision of "hands-on" support to the REMTh RIS3 implementation process. In addition to developing the process, the envisaged outcomes include the support for the launch of concrete projects in the region and consequent absorption of structural funds. In view of this primary aim, this event represents an important step along this path.

Two concrete concerns for the EDP were emphasised by JRC-IPTS in the introductory session. First was the issue of whether it is best for ideas to match the funding available or whether a more ambitious search for ideas should be undertaken based on potential, for which it is

better to then seek appropriate funding. Second, the need to better engage with international networks was emphasised.

In order to fully explore the value chain of wine production, a variety of international and national experts were invited to make presentations centred on each of the four themes identified above. To further examine ideas and opportunities in each of these areas, parallel working groups were organised, following a common participatory methodology. These centred on the generation of ideas, and the selection of the most feasible for further discussion. Moderators and rapporteurs were appointed for each group to oversee the application of the methodology and report the outcomes.

The participation and engagement in the event, in terms of both level and quality, were high. More than 70 stakeholders from within the region and beyond participated. Both the plenary and parallel sessions saw active engagement by both invited experts and stakeholders from the region and beyond.

A key issue identified by the region during the RIS3 preparation was the lack of business involvement. A key positive outcome of this event was the level of business participation: more than half of the participants came from the private sector, and actively engaged in proposal formulations for future collaboration.

This generation and exchange of ideas were key elements of the meeting. The outcomes of the working groups were highly constructive, with a number of feasible ideas, proposed and thought through during the second day. The participatory process used for this worked smoothly, with participants actively engaging in the tasks, and with lessons emerging for its refinement in the subsequent such events envisaged under the preparatory action. The overall perception of participants was highly positive.

A key issue of the meeting was the making and reinforcement of linkages, and the importance of subsequent joint efforts, on both bilateral and multilateral bases. The good levels of engagement between the stakeholders should be followed up.

As the first event of its kind, it has also generated valuable lessons in how to refine the EDP focus group methodology and the overall strategic approach of the project. This also aligns with the second objective of the project, in generating lessons that can be applied to other regions.

Outcomes: Participation

In planning the event, a broad mix of potential participants was identified, based on an initial value chain analysis. The main stakeholder groups included:

- Individual grape growers and regional associations;
- Wineries and distilleries.
- Researchers and experts on the primary activities of the value chain (e.g., agronomists, oenologists, biologists)

- Experts on the secondary activities of the value chain (e.g., suppliers of equipment, packaging, fertilisers, marketers, distributors)
- Representatives of other value chains that provide mutually beneficial opportunities, i.e. tourism and cultural events.
- Chambers of Commerce.
- Representatives of regional and national administration.

To provide a broader perspective, 13 national and international experts were also participated, having been invited to share their knowledge and expertise on:

- Marketing and promotion of Greek wine in foreign markets
- Access to European funding and how to get involved in international project consortia
- Support programmes for the Wine Sector in the Context of the Common Agricultural Policy
- Aspects of the four key themes of the EDP.

In total, 73 participants registered for the event, and while not all eventually participated, the event was publicised locally and on-line, bringing the total number of participants to almost 100.

Outcomes: Parallel Working Groups

For each of the four themes listed above, a parallel working group was organised, based on the participant preferences expressed by all participants during the on-line registration process. Each group followed the same basic procedure, guided by a moderator and with the support of a rapporteur:

- An introductory presentation by a local or national expert on the theme.
- A brainstorming session in which each member of the group was asked to generate an idea under the thematic area of the work group (task 1).
- The presentation of the ideas by each participant to the rest of the group (task 2).
- The discussion and selection of most favourable ideas leading to the formation of “innovation partnerships”, sub-groups within the main working group (task 3).
- The development of ideas by the partnerships and initial reflections on issues to be tackled for ideas to be transformed into concrete projects (task 4).
- The presentation of ideas within the working group and then to the plenary session.

There was some deviation from the four workgroups initially envisaged. As the level of interest for the environmental sustainability theme was relatively low and that for wine tourism very high, the environmental sustainability working group was replaced by a second working group on tourism. The four EDP working groups were attended by 46 participants (excluding moderators and rapporteurs) divided among the stakeholder groups as follows:

- 30 from industry
- 10 from research / academia
- 6 from public administration (national and/or regional)

Table 1 summarise the main outcomes of the working groups.

Table 1: Main outcomes of the participatory exercise

Working Group	Idea/Partnership Name	Brief description	Expected results/outcomes
R&I focusing on technological improvements in wine	Research and exploitation of local wine grape varieties	Research on 6-7 local wine grape varieties aiming at the definition of their oenological potential and its enhancement during the grape and wine production process	Definition of the varietal character/potential of each variety Enhancement of the initial potential during all stages of wine production, from vineyard site evaluation to the marketing of the final products
	Development of a network for collecting and management of data on wine grape cultivation	Development of a vineyard network within REMTh using GIS tools. The aim is the monitoring and collection of vineyard data (soil, climate, in-situ sensors) and their management with the use of adapted software	Development of an interactive platform designed to assist vine growers in decision-making Assistance to Regional Administration to designate areas of predilection for vine growing and wine production
	Exploitation of indigenous microbiota in the production of local wines	Exploitation of local grape microflora for the quality improvement and diversification of local wines	Contribution for the improvement of local wine identity
	Methods to prevent the growth of Dekkera/Brettanomyces bruxel-lensis against wine spoilage	Prevention of spoilage of local wines by the yeast Dekkera/Brettanomyces bruxellensis since it is often associated with the local wine industry	Productivity improvement for local grape producers
R&I focusing on by-products of grapes and wine	Energy Production using by-products of winemaking or distilling	Use of the biomass of the entire wine producing value chain to produce biogas through anaerobic fermentation	Implementation of an environmentally friendly alternative method for energy production
	Food Supplements and Cosmetics	Production of food supplements and cosmetics using extracts from by-products of the various stages of the wine or tsipouro production process	Exploitation of a low capacity plant to extract useful substances from by-products of wine and tsipouro production
	Using distillery by-products as organic fertiliser	Use of "giparta", the key by-product of the tsipouro-distilling process, as a low-cost organic fertilizer	Production of an organic fertilizer based on an organic residue rich in N ₂
	Using by-products of winemaking or distilling for animal feeds	Production of animal feeds using extracts from by-products of the various stages of the wine or tsipouro production process	Exploitation of a low capacity plant to extract useful substances from by-products of wine and tsipouro production and sell to animal feed manufacturers
	Tsipouro-based Liqueurs	Introduction to the market of tsipouro-based liqueurs flavoured by pomegranate, dogwood berries, honey or similar local products	Creation and development of a completely new to the market product family based on a traditional production technique
Wine tourism (combined outcome of two working groups)	Identification and preservation of local wine varieties and related cultural assets	Adoption of selected wine varieties, cultivation and wine making practices and methodologies in order to disseminate this knowledge to all businesses and interested individuals	Establishment of relations of local communities with local culture and wine making with the overall aim to increase accessibility, and visibility of wine, wineries and vineyards
	Creation and branding of an integrated	Exploitation of regional wines, gastronomy and cultural	Integration of wine-tourism in touristic and

EDP workshop on wine industry

Working Group	Idea/Partnership Name	Brief description	Expected results/outcomes
	tourist product based on wine, gastronomy and cultural heritage	assets in order to create a strong image of REMTh.	agricultural strategy of the Region Creation of a “unique touristic offer” to the market Development of a highly recognised touristic destination
	Formation of a “wine value chain” cluster within REMTh	Creation of strong linkages among the various players of the wine value chain within the Region	Foundation of a model based on economies of scale for the creation of sustainable touristic product