

Outcomes of the 2nd Roundtable Discussion on Triple Helix Interactions and Smart Specialization

Organized by the THA Chapter of Greece

24 February 2014, Thessaloniki, Greece

The second roundtable discussion on Triple Helix Interactions and Smart Specialization of the THA Chapter of Greece which took place on Monday 24th of February 2014 in Thessaloniki continued the success of the previous roundtable bringing together key representatives from the triple helix stakeholders. The session was coordinated by Prof. Ketikidis (President of the THA Chapter of Greece) and by Mr Stavros Mantzanakis, director of Emetris Consulting (Sponsor of the event). The panellists of the roundtable discussion were: Dr. Christos Vasilakos, General Secretary for Research and Technology (GSRT), Mrs Tzelina Makrantonaki, Vice-Regional Governor of the region of Central Macedonia for Technology and Innovation, Prof. Ioannis Chatzidimitriou, Rector of University of Macedonia (UoM), Prof. Pericles Mitkas from Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), Prof. Athanasios Konstantopoulos, Chairman of The Centre for Research & Technology (CERTH), Mr. Nikos Zaharis, Director of the South East European Research Centre (SEERC), Mr. Dimitrios Lakasas, Chairman of the Alexander Innovation Zone (AIZ) and of the Greek International Business Association (SEVE) and Dr. Christos Georgiou, Director of the Research & Documentation Department of the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece (FING). The public that participated to the event exceeded 150 people.

The central pillar of the discussion was the extent to which triple helix interactions can enable the implementation of the smart specialization strategy towards economic growth. Actions that need to be taken and the tools to be deployed towards achieving regional development and the exit from the crisis have also been discussed. The perspectives-opportunities are significant as it was clearly shown during the roundtable discussion and despite the partial disagreements, there is a strategic convergence both among the stakeholders and at the national agency for innovation (GSRT). A further significant point was the intention and high motivation of all the stakeholders to collaborate in order to properly deliver their services, knowledge and know-how towards the market demands so that both the industry and society (the 4th Helix) can benefit.

The key domains of the region of Central Macedonia which have the capacity to offer their competitive advantage at the region and on which the smart specialization strategy should be implemented, are: the agri-food sector, energy, tourism, building materials, transportation and logistics, information and communication technology, textile industry, sea related industries, green development and last but not least the key enabling technologies (KET) such as biology and nanotechnology. To this end, the focus and common interest of the triple helix stakeholders from this region should be tailored around these sectors towards a proper implementation of the smart specialization strategy with economic growth.

In order to have positive results, there is a high need to increase the competitiveness and the internationalization through innovation and this is where the convergence of the triple helix stakeholders will significantly contribute to. Enterprises need support in order to turn to the universities and research centres for finding solutions for developing their products and making them suitable for the market. In parallel, the government needs to provide a stable political and taxation framework, offering at the same time opportunities to support the entrepreneurs at the strategic planning of their actions and investments. It should be understood that the 3 stakeholders share common interests and their collaboration will create multiple benefits and win-win situations for the creation of internationally commercialised goods and services.

Actions which could contribute towards the above mentioned direction consist of: procedural simplification, provision of incentives/motivation, creation and support of research clusters with representatives from all triple helix stakeholders, support for innovation in relation to SMEs, programs for business start-ups, programs for youth innovation clusters as well as programs for the valorisation of research outcomes so that added value is created from the money invested in the market. Furthermore, fund absorption from and for innovation is critical for the strategic planning of the region's smart specialisation strategy.

The THA pinpoints that the Greek economy is at a critical point and thus suggests that no more time is wasted towards defining policies and actions which will promote the growth. Moreover, a common belief is that the Triple Helix is the DNA of the smart specialisation and will help the enterprises in Greece to become more international, competitive and robust.

The next steps of the THA chapter of Greece are associated with researching both the drivers and barriers for boosting the promoters and mitigating the blockers of regional economic growth, so that this growth can be achieved through proper entrepreneurship and innovation. For this reason, further roundtable discussions will take place in the next period of time as well networking activities which will involve the interested triple helix stakeholders from the whole region of South East Europe.