

# P-IRIS

**Policies to improve rural areas' innovation systems  
by professionalising networking activities  
and use of innovation tools**

**A P-IRIS position paper  
presented and adopted as part of  
P-IRIS final conference**



## Why our regions wanted to carry out the Interreg Europe project P-IRIS.

The rural areas of Europe are diverse. Some have diversified advanced economies. Some depend heavily on agriculture. Some are close to big cities and some struggle with accessing vital services and may face decline in population.

The rural areas have also important issues to share. The villages are closely connected to the environment and natural resources. We may contribute to solve some of the big societal challenges of our time. We have access to valuable tacit knowledge based on different and unique cultural and industrial traditions. We may have an advantage in combining tacit and research-based knowledge during innovation processes.

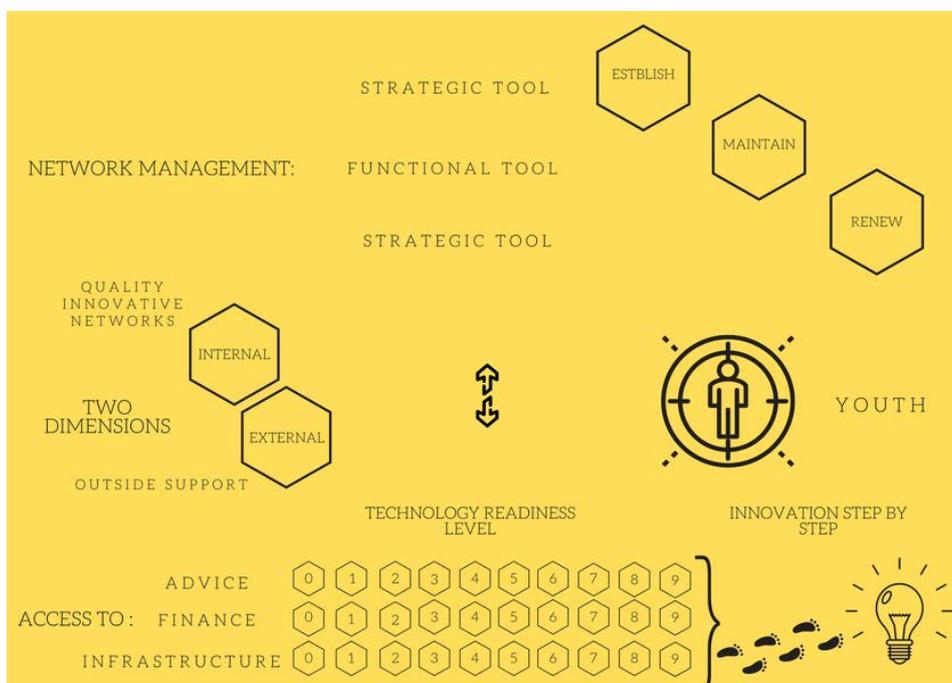
When we speak about mission-oriented innovation to solve our time's big societal challenges and when we speak about smart societies taking advantage of modern technology to increase quality of life, we need to address the capacity-building of our human resources.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are less and less an individual issue. It is more and more a collective effort including building supply- and value chains and bringing people together in entrepreneurial discovery processes.

Our starting point has been: **Rural areas cannot copy lessons learnt from urban clusters. We need to define methods working within rural innovation networks.**

## Building bridges to share knowledge - the core of P-IRIS.

As the full name of the project indicates, we address both skills to make innovation-networking effective and external support that is needed from the point of view of a rural innovation network. We especially address the fragmentation and demand a support-system designed for every step of the innovation chain; from the process of understanding a problem, the refinement of an idea until market introduction.



## Our key messages

1. Recognise and take advantage of the digital skills of young people as a changemaker for rural areas.
2. Rural areas can take advantage of the approach “living labs” for innovation
3. Co-working spaces (also enabling remote workplaces) provide an entrepreneurial environment. Develop cooperation between coworking spaces.
4. Include rural innovation networks in the cluster policies
5. Give priority to test- and demonstration infrastructure to benefit from creating fruitful cooperation between people with practical tacit knowledge and people with theoretical expertise.
6. Develop skills in innovation-network management
7. A proactive public sector is more important for the rural innovation system than for the urban one.

### 1. Youth – a key target group

**The digital skills of young people must be recognised as a potential changemaker for rural areas.** Youth of today are more used to solving problems together and to share knowledge. Quality digital infrastructure is a prerequisite in sparsely populated areas.

P-IRIS has focused on effective managed formal innovation networks. Networking that ease access to competence and support is vital when young innovative people decide where to settle down after education.



During the Corona crisis digital competences to cooperate on distance has increased a lot. Digitisation will allow even more distant cooperation in the future; e.g. by distributive manufacturing, drones for deliveries, more sophisticated distant lifelong learning to mention a few.

Policy recommendation:

- Prioritize digital infrastructure
- Develop networking skills among all important players needed for entrepreneurial discoveries; including distant cooperation
- Villages are perfect as living labs to experiment and find new solutions to improve our lives and to take care of the environment. Young people’s digital skills and cooperation-skills will be an asset.

## 2. Living labs and the smart village future



The 4th element of the quadruple helix – the user groups or the NGOs - are an underused asset for innovation in rural areas.

A village is an ideal place to use as a living lab.

- People know each other across sectors
- You may combine tacit and formal knowledge in innovation processes

Policy recommendation:

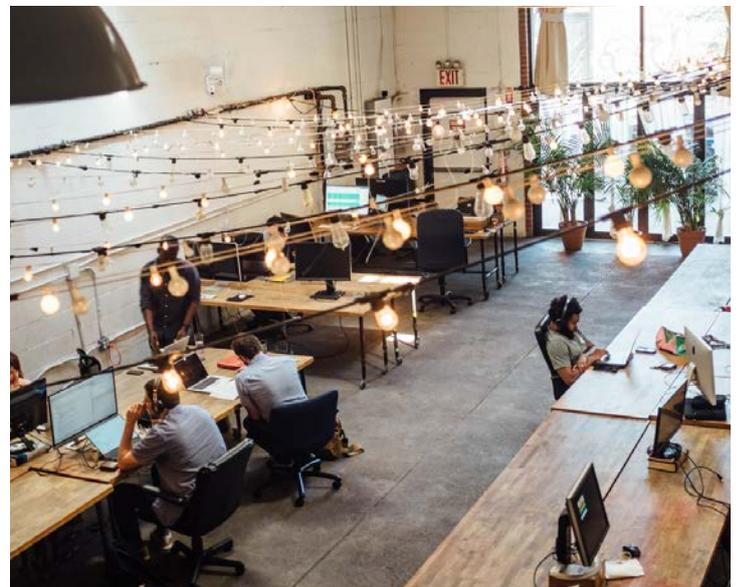
- There is a need to maintain and develop human capacity to take an active part in forming rural future. Skills in effective innovation network management are P-IRIS' contribution.
- Use villages for low-scale experimentation. Rural living labs may also be a great opportunity of experimentation for businesses located outside the rural area, thus creating important links.
- Rural living labs – close to our natural recourses – have advantages for carrying out mission-oriented innovation processes; to solve societal and environmental challenges.

## 3. Remote working and coworking space

Creating attractive jobs for young people in rural areas can be supported by establishing collaborative spaces where their service offer is designed to help provide future and existing business with the 'missing pieces' on TRL scale. This kind of spaces create a viable rural ecosystem that functions at the site level and access wider systems.

Remote working in general can reduce 'out-commuting' and support distance working within rural communities and internationally.

Co-working spaces represents a clear bottom-up approach and are often informal networks.



Policy recommendation:

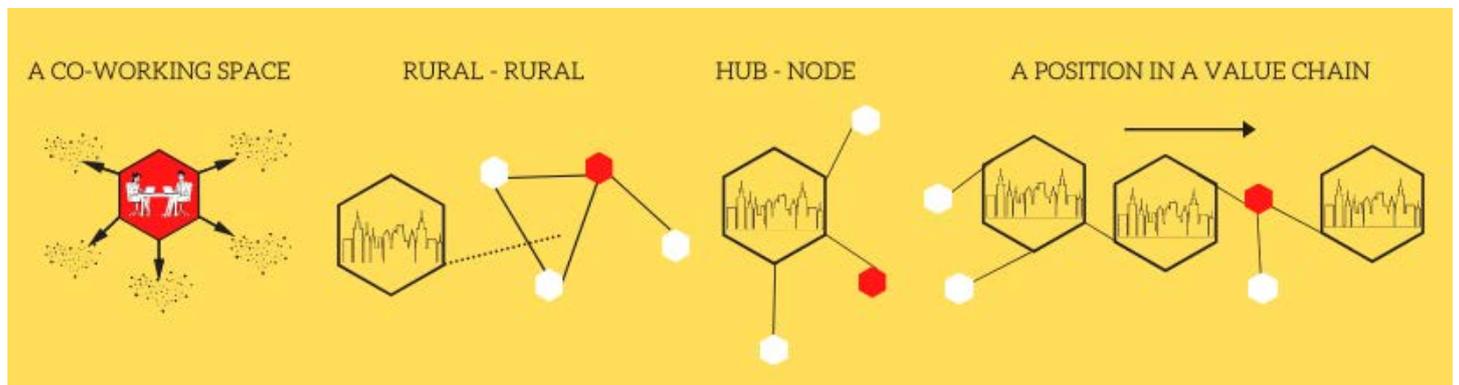
- Rural coworking spaces are social spaces not just offices or walls, needing interaction to create or contribute to local economic, social and entrepreneur ecosystems;
- Existence of motivated professionals is more important than just having an available space;
- By supporting remote working in rural hubs it's also a concern of social connections and sharing of information, co-learning (peer learning), changing of working culture...
- These hubs have a great potential for projects of rural-urban and rural-rural development connections

## 4. Connect rural innovation networks to the outside world

The P-IRIS partnership had identified different innovation-network strategies to become more complete and to become well connected to players outside the local area.

- The rural innovation network may be a node to an urban cluster
- The rural innovation network may take a position and even take the lead in developing a value chain
- Cooperation between rural networks may be a better choice than rural-urban cooperation
- Co-working spaces: a strategy to create an entrepreneurial environment where the involved partners have their informal networks or formal work in different directions, but where the local space inspires

Our recommendation: include rural innovation networks in the cluster policies.



*The red hexagon illustrates "our" innovation network. The big hexagon illustrates an urban cluster.*

## 5. A holistic support system

The innovation process is not linear, but simplified described as steps from problem, evaluating ideas to solve the problem and at the end introduction in a market. An innovation network needs to access support for every step; finance, advise and relevant infrastructure as facilities for learning and for test and demonstrations.

The support system should be less fragmented in order to support the innovation process seamless from one step to the next.

We want to highlight one message:

- Four of our partners identifies access to test- and demonstration facilities as missing. Give priority to such infrastructure especially where you may benefit from creating fruitful cooperation between people with practical tacit knowledge and people with theoretical expertise. Rural areas may have an advantage in creating such knowledge bridges.

## 6. Develop skills in innovation-network management

Innovative ideas are based on need for improvements. It is a bottom-up processes. In our time, entrepreneurship is more and more a collective process. Policy measures should therefore target skills; skills to cooperate effectively.

“Time is money”. Important actors do not want to waste time on meetings without progress and clear, common targets. P-IRIS have created a toolbox to facilitate strategic discussions during a start-up phase or during a restructuring phase. There are also 7 tools for improving the running of a network. All tools are illustrated by examples.

The most important P-IRIS policy message is: develop skills in innovation-network management.

Our toolbox may be used to educate innovation-network managers and to use as inspiration for discussions within a network.

### INNOTOOL

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#### A DIGITAL TOOLBOX FOR STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP OF INNOVATIVE NETWORKS

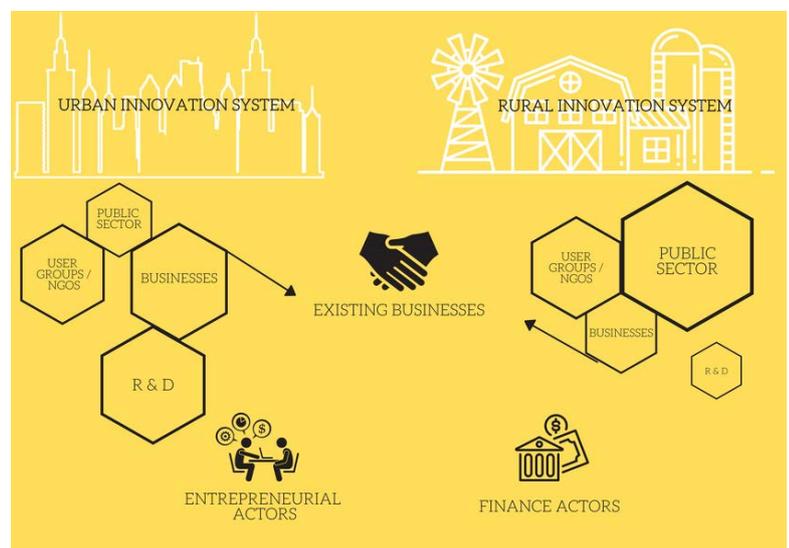


## 7. A proactive public sector is vital

A proactive public sector is more important for the rural innovation system than for the urban one. The rural innovation system is often not complete. Important business actors miss, and the R&D expertise is located far away.

The public sector has an important role to play as facilitator. Funding of course, but also the capacity building to have effective innovation-network management.

*The figure illustrates relative sizes between actors, and also a need to include different business-actors.*





**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Stryn Tech Hub

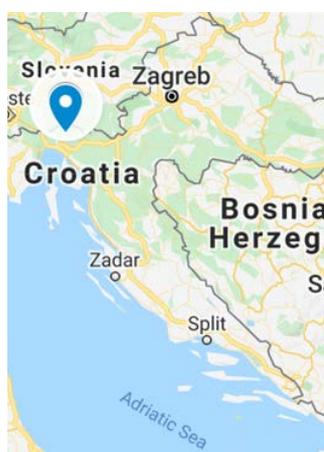
**LOCATION:**

Vestlandet, Norway

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

In P-IRIS the partners develop a tool box for managing innovation networks. Stryn Tech Hub demonstrates successful restructuring after a period of decline.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/3311/stryn-tech-hub/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

LAG Gorski kotar network

**LOCATION:**

Gorski kotar, Croatia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

A network LAG Gorski kotar is approaching the problem of this hidden mountain pearl called the Gorski kotar in a new and innovative way. By using Leader's rural development methodology, it is trying to open a new and prospective development of the region.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2702/lag-gorski-kotar-network/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Technology transfer office

**LOCATION:**

Rijeka, Croatia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Transfer of technology and cooperation between University and SME's.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2700/technology-transfer-office/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

e-County project: Planning and developing Primorje-Gorski kotar County's open broadband communication

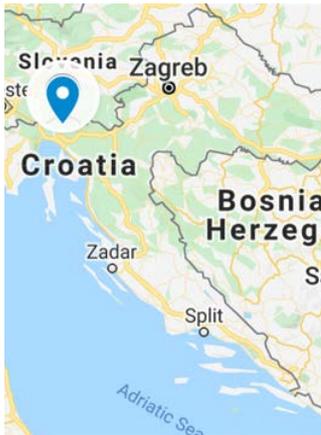
**LOCATION:**

Primorje-Gorski kotar County, Croatia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Planning and developing broadband network for rural and mountain areas in Primorje-Gorski kotar county - Croatia.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2699/e-county-project-planning-and-developing-primorje-gorski-kotar-county-s-open-broadband-communication/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Pins network

**LOCATION:**

Gorski kotar, Croatia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Establishing non formal network between public sector and SME's and creating better services for entrepreneurship development in rural mountain area.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2698/pins-network/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Public-private partnership facilitates offshoots and start-up companies

**LOCATION:**

Vestlandet, Norway

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

A systematic approach for supporting innovative business ideas, in terms of common infrastructure, advisory services and a conducive environment.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2558/public-private-partnership-facilitates-offshoots-and-start-up-companies/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

University-Business Knowledge Transfer Plan

**LOCATION:**

Castilla y León, Spain

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Project launched by the Regional Government of Castilla y León to improve links between the academic and business world.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2379/university-business-knowledge-transfer-plan/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Network of Business and Entrepreneurship Management Technicians

**LOCATION:**

Burgos Province, Spain

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Network of six technicians working in the rural areas of Burgos offering in situ and face to face support to companies and entrepreneurs.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2377/network-of-business-and-entrepreneurship-management-technicians/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

InnoCámaras Programme

**LOCATION:**

Burgos Province, Spain

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Programme developed by the Burgos Chamber of Commerce to promote innovation among the companies placed in rural areas of Burgos.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2237/innocamaras-programme/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Burgos alimenta

**LOCATION:**

Burgos Province, Spain

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Network of producers and companies dealing with the agro-food sector managed by the Provincial Government of Burgos.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2235/burgos-alimenta/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Development village Velika Preska

**LOCATION:**

Velika Preska, Slovenia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Successfully implemented development vision of the village Velika Preska by the local community Polšnik.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2176/development-village-velika-preska/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

EMBLA - culture for sharing in order to improve low season tourism

**LOCATION:**

Vestlandet, Norway

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Solutions to offer full time work for key employees in tourism in order to increase tourism low seasons by offering quality services and experiences all year.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2015/embla-culture-for-sharing-in-order-to-improve-low-season-tourism/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Consorzio Tutela IGT Valle Camonica

**LOCATION:**

Valle Camonica, Lombardy region, Italy

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

It is a non-profit inter-professional association aimed at the recovery, protection and valorisation of the wine sector in the valley.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2009/consorzio-tutela-igt-valle-camonica/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

“Consorzio dei due parchi” and the local wood supply-chain

**LOCATION:**

Valle Camonica, Lombardy region, Italy

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

Consortium operating in the local wood supply-chain. It aims at protecting local woods and valorising the local woodland heritage.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2008/consorzio-dei-due-parchi-and-the-local-wood-supply-chain/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Segno Artigiano

**LOCATION:**

Valle Camonica, Lombardy region, Italy

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

A network of local artisans. Segno Artigiano is a driver to reduce the marginality of Valle Camonica by increasing its level of attractiveness both in terms of job opportunities and of place-based tourism.

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/2007/segno-artigiano/>



**GOOD PRACTICE:**

Coworking Entrepreneurship Centre and Incubator - KIKŠTARTER

**LOCATION:**

Kamnik, Slovenia

**ABOUT GOOD PRACTICE:**

KIKŠTARTER is a co-working space, incubator and accelerator that also offers regular trainings and demonstrations of good practices and stimulating environment.

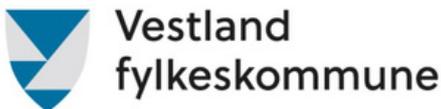
<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/goodpractices/item/1923/coworking-entrepreneurship-centre-and-incubator-kikstarter/>

Find out more about the P-IRIS project and our partners:



# Policies to improve rural areas' innovation systems by professionalising networking activities and use of innovation tools

NEWS EVENTS GOOD PRACTICES CONTACTS LIBRARY ACTION PLANS



**Vestland County Municipality (lead partner)**

Norway

<https://www.vestlandfylke.no/>



**Development centre of the Heart of Slovenia**

Slovenia

<http://www.razvoj.si/?lng=en>



**Local Development Agency PINS**

Croatia

<https://www.pins-skrad.hr/english.php>



**Regional Council of Central Ostrobothnia**

Finland

<http://www.keski-pohjanmaa.fi/>



**Society for the Development of the Province of Burgos**

Spain

<https://sodebur.es>



**Poliedra - Politecnico di Milano**

Italy

<http://www.poliedra.polimi.it/en/homepage/>