

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Disparities between disadvantaged areas (like rural, mountainous or underdeveloped urban areas) and other more favoured regions can be eliminated by facilitating access to the knowledge and information society for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) located in economically weaker areas. **EMBRACE II** aims to promote the **development of SMEs** located in such areas and increase their **competitiveness** and **transnational cooperation** through the following major actions:

- ❖ The enhancement of an existing **successful network** created under its predecessor (the EMBRACE project) with eight new local/regional nodes and new added-value services;
- ❖ The establishment of a **Pilot Observatory** that will identify and quantify the impacts of Information and Communication Technologies on local/regional socio-economic development, with **nine local/regional "antennas"**.

The concept of this virtual structure is quite innovative, since it correlates **local economic growth** with the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in order to conclude on the tangible and intangible benefits brought by ICT at macro and micro level for SMEs. The ultimate goal is to **increase** the **awareness** of SMEs and policy- and decision-makers of the socio-economic benefits stemming from the Information Society and to offer specific ICT tools that will help SMEs better understand and utilise those benefits.

RESULTS AND EFFECTS

The main results of EMBRACE II will be:

- ❖ Expansion of the established EMBRACE network to new areas and countries, particularly by creating **eight new nodes** in EU Member States, Accession Countries and Non-EU Member States, as well as enhancement of the network with new online services;
- ❖ Design, development and operation of the Pilot Observatory that will identify and **quantify the impacts of ICT** on local and regional socio-economic development for SMEs;
- ❖ Establishment of **cooperation among organisations** involved in the development and operation of the new nodes of the EMBRACE Network, as well as the Pilot Observatory.

Formulation of more focused **policy proposals and recommendations** regarding the information and knowledge society on the grounds of the data provided by the Pilot Observatory.





IMPROVING THE ACCESS OF SMEs FROM RURAL REGIONS TO THE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION SOCIETY

The project **EMBRACE** was going to facilitate the access to Knowledge and Information Society for SMEs that, being located in rural and undeveloped urban areas, have difficulties in managing innovative ICT tools. The project EMBRACE aimed to:

- ❖ Promote the access to **Knowledge and Information Society** through new information technology services (online and offline consulting and training, online matchmaking for getting funds from investors, e-commerce, etc.) for SMEs that, being located in rural and undeveloped urban areas, have difficulties in managing innovative ICT tools;
- ❖ Develop and/ or extend the **cooperation and networking** among business, academic, research, know-how and technology transfer related institutions;
- ❖ Introduce **technology and information systems**, in order to facilitate and promote the exchange of information between SMEs, the market and other economic / financial entities of the CADSES area.

EMBRACE project foresaw **positive impacts**, such as:

- ❖ Increase of **SME competitiveness** in the regions concerned;
- ❖ Utilization of **new channels for business cooperation** (e-commerce);
- ❖ Improvement of **business support services** provided by public entities through the use of ICT;
- ❖ Adoption of **new methods and means** for technology, innovation and know-how transfer.



INTERREG III B CADSES

CENTRAL, ADRIATIC, DANUBIAN AND SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEAN SPACE

The project **EMBRACE** and the new **EMBRACE II** are implemented within the context of INTERREG III B CADSES programme (*PRIORITY 2: Efficient and Sustainable Transport Systems and Access to the Information Society - MEASURE 2.2: Improving Access to Knowledge and the Information Society*).

Interreg III B CADSES is part of Strand B of the Interreg Community Initiative Programme referring to Transnational Cooperation. The community initiative **INTERREG III** is one of the Community Initiatives realized by the European Commission in order to define common solutions to specific problems. Mainly destined to favour a harmonious, balanced and sustainable development of the European territory for the 2000-2006 period. INTERREG III is an EU-funded programme that helps Europe's regions form partnerships to work together on common projects.

The **CADSES Programme** is, among the 13 transnational co-operation areas in Europe, the largest and most complex area. From the coasts of the Baltic Sea, through the mountains of the Central Europe and the Hungarian plains, through the Austrian and Slovenian alpine landscapes, CADSES stretches down to western Italy and Greece, thus grouping the Balkan regions, including Moldova and part of Ukraine. The CADSES area comprises regions belonging to **18 countries** with **around 200 million people**, more than **15 ethnic groups**. CADSES has carried out the mission of INTERREG into **four priorities** covering themes like spatial, urban and rural development and immigration; transport systems and access to the information society; landscape, natural and cultural heritage; environment protection, resource management and risk prevention.

EMBRACE II PROJECT MEETINGS

KICK-OFF MEETING

26 & 27 JUNE 2006

TREK CONSULTING SA, ATHENS - GREECE

The kick off meeting was aimed at the presentation of the main topic of the project, such as:

- ❖ the **Projects idea**, focusing on its strategic and operational goals, concrete results, expected impacts, target group and beneficiaries of the actions to be undertaken;
- ❖ the **Work packages** in details;
- ❖ the **Partner organisations** of EMBRACE II;
- ❖ the **administrative and financial procedures** governing the project;
- ❖ the **project management and information flow** procedure;
- ❖ the **decision process** and the **cooperation mechanisms**.



1ST PROJECT MEETING

14 & 15 SEPTEMBER 2006

AGENCY FOR THE SUPPORT OF REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT, KOSICE - SLOVAKIA

The first Project meeting took place in Kosice. Main topic of the section was the formulation, development and establishment of the **SMEs Pilot Observatory for Economic Development through ICT** in order to:

- ❖ Allow Policy-makers to adopt **right policy decisions** to foster competitiveness of SMEs operating in the participating regions;
- ❖ Develop a system that allows the **analysis of SMEs performance** across countries and regions;
- ❖ Build up a **database on information** related to SMEs, classified according to sectors of activity and geographical zones that can be used as market data.

7 General **Thematic fields** on which data will be collected:

- ❖ Regional and national economic activity;
- ❖ Training, Skills base and skills gap;
- ❖ Legislation and regulation;
- ❖ Access to ICT and Innovation;
- ❖ Technical capacity of SMEs;
- ❖ International commerce / external trade statistics;
- ❖ Taxation and finance.

2ND PROJECT MEETING

14 & 15 FEBRUARY 2007

CESTEC, MILAN - ITALY

The second project meeting held in Milan was focused on the training of the administrators. The **EMBRACE II Portal administrators' interface** and the **content management functionalities** have been demonstrated and explained as well as the different applications of the **EMBRACE II Portal user interface** and its functionalities. Moreover part of the Italian section was dedicated to the presentation of the **Communication plan** elaborated on each partner **Stakeholder analysis**, the communication tools, such as the **Project brochure** in both English and native language, and the **future Local conferences**. During these events each new node will disseminate the **project services and initiatives** also through a **Network brochure** produced in both English and native language.



NEXT MEETING

In **June** Regional Development Centre Koper – RDA South Primorska, **Slovenia**, will host the 3rd Project Meeting.

DISSEMINATION EVENTS AND TOOLS

EUREGIA

23-25 OCTOBER 2006, LEIPZIG - GERMANY

The 2nd Annual Conference of the INTERREG III B CADSES Neighbourhood Programme has been organized as part of the Euregia 2006 in Leipzig, on 23-25 October 2006. The event and the **project exhibition** provided a very good opportunity for networking and exchange of experiences. The Lead partner presented the EMBRACE II project at the Project Exhibition. More information can be found on: www.cadses.net/en/news/CADSES_Annual_Conference.html.



THE ENTREPRENEURIAL VOICE OF PRIMORSKA

Regional Development Centre Koper published **3 articles** in the monthly magazine, "The Entrepreneurial voice of Primorska", to inform users about the ongoing activities regarding the project

SECOND ICT FORUM 2006

29-30 NOVEMBER 2006, NIS - SERBIA

Regional Chamber of Economy Niš presented **EMBRACE II** project at the Regional Second ICT Forum 2006, held on 29-30 November 2006, organized in RCE Niš.



BARDA

BULGARIA

Regional Development Agency Plovdiv presented **Embrace II** at BARDA, the Bulgarian Association of Regional Development Agencies and Business Centres – involving 23 at present members all over Bulgaria.



FUTURE SEMINARS & CONFERENCES

18 – 20 APRIL 2007, PALIC -SERBIA

Regional Chamber of Economy Niš will present the EMBRACE II Project during **E-business conference**. Please visit www.etrgovina.org.

APRIL 2007, NIŠ - SERBIA

The activity of the EMBRACE II Project will be presented at the **Regional conference in Niš**.

APRIL 2007, ÚSTÍ REGION - CZECH REPUBLIC

Regional Development Agency of the Ústí Region PLC foresees the organisation of **two seminars** about the EMBRACE II project in first half of April located in the Ústí region for SMEs and chambers of commerce.

MAY 2007, KOPER - SLOVENIA

The RRC Koper is planning to carry out few **local conferences** for entrepreneurs, SME support organizations and other stakeholders where introducing the project, its activities and its network.

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