SIRA DANUBE: Smart and Innovative Rural Areas
Kick-off Workshop, Osijek 9-10 October 2013

Workshop Documentation and Material

Kick-off hosted at the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Josip Strossmayer, Osijek
Project within the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR), Priority Area 8,
funded by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg
Project Coordination: Eastern Europe Centre, Universität Hohenheim
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1 Workshop Programme

Wednesday 9 October 2013

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<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:30</td>
<td>Arrival and registration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td><strong>Opening</strong> of the workshop and welcome addresses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prof. Dr. sc. Vlado Guberac, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Josip Strossmayer, Osijek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:15</td>
<td>Introduction about the project background and the workshop objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. Hans-Peter Herdlitschka, State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg; Dr. h.c. Jochem Gieraths, Dr. sc. agr. Angelika Thomas, Eastern Europe Centre, University of Hohenheim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Presentation of participants: market place with posters/ flipcharts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Exchange on <strong>present strengths and constraints</strong> to contribute to the agricultural/ rural knowledge system and business environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:00</td>
<td>Lunch break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>Exchange on <strong>present strengths and constraints</strong> to contribute to the agricultural/ rural knowledge system and business environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:30</td>
<td>Elaboration of <strong>needs, demands and thematic areas</strong> for Centres of Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:15</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:45</td>
<td>Elaboration of <strong>needs, demands and thematic areas</strong> for Centres of Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18:15</td>
<td>Closing of first workshop day</td>
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<tr>
<td>19:30</td>
<td>Dinner (Tvrd, Restaurant Ruža)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thursday 10 October 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Welcome and opening of 2nd workshop day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Future outline on <strong>key activities and characteristics of the Centres of Competence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:30</td>
<td><strong>Next steps and outlook</strong> on project activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wrap-up and closing of the workshop programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:30</td>
<td><strong>Trip to and visit of the local action group Karašica (15-16 p.m.)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17:00</td>
<td>In Valpovo (20 km from Osijek). Presentation of the LAG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Workshop facilitation: Thomas Wehinger
2 Project Background and Objectives

The SIRA DANUBE project was approved in summer by the State Ministry of Baden-Württemberg within the Priority Area 8 of the EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) – ‘To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development, rural areas’.

The overall objective of the project is to initiate 3-5 “Competence Centres for Smart and Innovative Rural Areas” in the EU Danube region at universities and/or other educational institutions in the field of agriculture, natural resource protection, bio-energy, rural development. Within the project duration from 15 July 2013 until 14 July 2014 the concept for the centres shall be developed including a master plan how to set them up. The wider perspective is to use EUSDR and the upcoming EU funding period to actually establish the Competence Centres.

The Centres of Competence (CCs) SIRA DANUBE shall combine the technological resources and know-how of universities and training centres to intensify dialogue and cooperation between science, private sector and politics. Interactive cooperation of scientific and educational institutions and industry will be given a prominent role to strengthen regional competitiveness of the whole agri-food industry. Additional and new research ideas shall be developed jointly with industry and other stakeholder in the field.

Thus, according to the project proposal CCs SIRA DANUBE together with regional and/or transnational partners from universities, private sector and other institutions will:

- support businesses and science through interdisciplinary and institutional cooperation to strengthen competitiveness of SMEs through the transfer of knowledge and technology within food value chains and the bio energy sector;
- institutionalize existing competences and individual scientific disciplines linked closely to process the powerful and timely research of modern and rapidly developing agricultural and food sciences and bio fuels;
- enhance applied research and development projects, for example in the determination of the R&D needs and to coordinate policy recommendations particularly in the transnational and regional context;
- help to develop training measures and methods in further and adult education and to link existing networks and institutions on regional and transnational level closer together;
- provide consultancy expertise for the application for funding and financing services for farmers/entrepreneurs;
- enhance training and network building of "Young Excellence Professionals " as future leaders in the agriculture, food and bio-energy sectors.

During a first study tour in July 2013 and preparatory interviews with potential partners in Serbia, Croatia, Romania and Hungary the high interest in the project was expressed by the visited institutions and individuals. The outcomes of these first discussion led o the preliminary conclusion, that the CCs should have distinct complementary topics, on which each can concentrate on, and at the same identified topics of general interest, where all centres contribute equally; through cross-border cooperation, the partners and target groups of the centres of competence shall all benefit from the specific expertise gained in the complementary topics; main headings under the roof of the bio-economy could be: a) Healthy food production, b) sustainable agriculture and biodiversity, c) Bio-energy, d) agrotourism?. Agrotourism was pointed out with a ques-
tion mark, not because of its lack of importance, but because of its topic within PA3 and other ongoing international project activities. A further specification of the topics and focus should be based on extended discussion with a broader representation of institutions and experts. An additional insight of the round trip in July was however, to include already existing development plans for centres of competence in concept of the SIRA DANUBE centres, resp. the network of CCs (e.g. CC of healthy food chains, intended from the agricultural faculty in Osijek and intentions from other institutions.)

Hans Peter Herdlitschka from the Ministry of Finance and Economics Baden-Wuerttemberg (coordinator PA8) underlined in his introduction the embedding of SIRA DANUBE within EUSDR. Thus support is given by the coordination of the PA8 and political support can be assumed for project proposals. To put CCs into practice his expectation is to develop project proposals, which will make use of the upcoming EU funding period 2014-2020, for example to start with projects in training or technology transfer.

From the side of the project coordination at the Universität Hohenheim, Jochem Gieraths referred to the long-standing partnerships and networks with the agricultural faculties of the Eastern European countries. This led not only to vast project experiences in curricula reform projects, but also to established cross border cooperation in the region and mutual exchange, especially in the field of agriculture and rural development. Besides this, links to other projects, e.g. to the EU coordinated Food Cluster Initiative (www.foodclusterinitiative.eu - in cooperation with EU DG research) and regional Agri-food-Cluster e.g. Hohenlohe-Württemberg or Upper Austria will be used. (note: In the meantime the results of the 6th Tempus call had been published. 2 EU TEMPUS IV Joint Projects are approved: "Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Agriculture in Alps-Danube-Adriatic Region": University of Zagreb (Lead) plus partners from Croatia, Austria, Germany (Hohenheim), Slovenia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro; "Renewable Energy Studies in Western Balkan Countries". University of Hohenheim (Lead) plus partners from Germany, Bulgaria, Austria, Slovakia, Albania, Montenegro)

Finally in the first section of the workshop, Angelika Thomas gave an overview about the overall project timeline, whereby the first project phase of 1 year should lead to further steps of establishment of the CCs.

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### Project Phases and Milestones

**Phase: 2013-2014**

- **Milestone 1**: Initiation of SIRA centres, feasibility and concept elaboration → preparation
- **Milestone 2**: Establishment of 3-5 SIRA centres → seeding
- **Milestone 3**: Realisation of the operational and functional performance of the centres through project acquisition and implementation → cultivation
- **Milestone 4**: Expansion of the activities into other regions and institutionalisation of a cluster of competence centres → spreading

**Phase: 2014-2020**

- **Milestone 2**: Establishment of 3-5 SIRA centres → seeding
- **Milestone 3**: Realisation of the operational and functional performance of the centres through project acquisition and implementation → cultivation
- **Milestone 4**: Expansion of the activities into other regions and institutionalisation of a cluster of competence centres → spreading

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### Milestone I: 2013-2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>07/2013</td>
<td>Final approval and official start</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07-10/2013</td>
<td>Partner identification and consultation (university and other network partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2013</td>
<td>Kick-off workshop (brainstorming/discussion on scope, content, organization, location and network of future SIRA centres)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/2013 - 06/2014</td>
<td>Feasibility studies in selected countries (research and training demand, target groups, legal and financial aspects, key organisations and add. partners, funding opportunities) and concept development for the centres (organisation, programme, network, partners...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/2014</td>
<td>Report and proposal on future steps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to this, workshop objectives for the kick-off were:

- Specify the needs and thematic working areas for future SIRA DANUBE competence centres
- Elaborate a common understanding on the profile and concept of the competence centres (focus areas, key activities, location, partners)
- Exchange and start of a partner network
- Clarification of next steps and working task
3 Strengths and Weaknesses

For the first working group the participants were asked to list strengths and weaknesses in the agriculture and rural knowledge and innovation system, using the own institutional perspective. The elaboration took place in “country groups”.

![Image of strengths and weaknesses diagram]

- Strengths
  - Experience & qualified HR for development of new methods & technology
  - Modules for practical application of the acquired knowledge
  - Existence of various forms of interactivity in education
  - Programmes in accordance with novelties

- Weaknesses
  - Inadequate organization based on national research
  - Insufficient knowledge of SNE to R&D

- Weaknesses
  - Insufficient networking - no follow-up for market replication
  - Inadequate level of specialisation
  - High level of specialisation
  - Demand for interdisciplinary approach

- Strong individuals
  - Underdeveloped knowledge transfer support system

- Weaknesses
  - Poor networking within and between the institutions

- Challenge
  - Mainly theoretical approach

![Image of role of higher education institutions in the agricultural and rural knowledge and innovation system]
The result is summarized in the table below. Looking at the collected statements, important potentials to fill gaps or overcome weaknesses are the following. In some cases opposite experiences exist and are evaluated as strengths:

- **Missing links between theory and practise** (especially business partners and “end-users”), including lack of interdisciplinary approaches and transfer of ideas. A common problem could be the theoretical approach of academic staff. On the other side the theoretical basis is stated also as strength. Also experiences with the involvement of decision makers/ stakeholders exist (HU), with cooperation with industry (SK) and with existing modules for practical application of acquired knowledge (BG).

- **Poor networking among institutions** was stated on the national level as a hindrance as well as a missing culture for cooperation, whereby on the other side strong international partnerships exist and international project experience.

- Support from and **capacity of local administration, updated programmes and modern legislation** can be found as strength as well as weakness. This depends on the specific subject and country background. On the institutional side, complex and fragmented organisation structure are a weakness.

- **Lack of funding**, low financial support, high overheads and low finance for innovation projects is a overall weakness stated.

- **Missing recognition of agriculture and of rural areas** are stated as weaknesses, as well as the existence/ performance of the extension system in agriculture.

- **Human resources**: qualified people, strong individuals, a good base on students, a sufficient base of professors, excellence and a high level of specialisation are strengths

- **Natural resources and traditional knowledge** are strengths to make use of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>country</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia Herzegovina</td>
<td>• Communication/ visibility of:</td>
<td>• Concerning: Local capacity administration &amp; micro economy: Financial contribution, Development plan &amp; programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(BiH)</td>
<td>- Natural resources</td>
<td>• To bat (support) external initiatives;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Excellence</td>
<td>• No social network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Modern legislation (part of them)</td>
<td>• closed mind and one solution mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Traditional Knowhow</td>
<td>• Culture of cooperation is lacking;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• International donor support</td>
<td>• Centre of knowledge: no link with rural area, Social infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership and human resources (age, education, lack of initiative)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Understanding &quot;Rural&quot; as only agriculture and farming activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Insufficient collaboration among universities on national level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Insufficient linking to the businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Deficiencies in the funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• No funding for market replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Insufficient access of SME’S to research and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>• Experienced and qualified human resources for development of new</td>
<td>• Insufficient collaboration among universities on national level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>methods &amp; technologies</td>
<td>• Insufficient linking to the businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Modules for practical application of the acquired knowledge</td>
<td>• Deficiencies in the funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Existence of various forms of interactivity in education</td>
<td>• No funding for market replication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Programmes updated in accordance with novelties</td>
<td>• Insufficient access of SME’S to research and development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A large number of projects &amp; international cooperation</td>
<td>Demand challenge; Mainly theoretical approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Slovenija / Croatia | - Strong individuals  
- Wide regional and topical coverage  
- International networking  
- High level of specialisation | - Underdeveloped knowledge transfer support system  
- Poor networking within and between the institutions  
- Lack of interdisciplinary approach |
| Hungary         | - Strong theoretical basis  
- International partnership  
- Vocational training best practice  
- Pilot or demonstration farms are involved  
- Contact with decision makers / stakeholders | - Recognition of knowledge as resource  
- Low reputation of agriculture  
- Without practical training - no jobs  
- Low budget and lack of capital  
- Academic staff has a mainly theoretical not very practical education and approach |
| Romania         | - Well connected, relatively “Young” & motivated people  
- Dynamic & continuously adjusting  
- The involvement of actors in technical transfer is growing  
- “force” to be innovative has a long tradition | - Poor connection between theory and practice  
- No farmer lead research  
- Low finance availability for innovation projects  
- Weak extension system |
| Serbia          | - Student base is good  
- Sufficient base of professors  
- Sufficient number of areas of specialization on all levels  
- International cooperation (experience) | - Complex & fragmented organisational structure  
- Low capacity and skills (Administrative, Management)  
- Low founding and high overheads  
- Knowledge creators not adequately connected to end users; lack of transfer of modern technologies |
| Slovakia        | - Personal equipment  
- Cooperation with industry  
- New ideas  
- Experts education | - Transfer of ideas to the industry or SME’S lack of close cooperation  
- Personal stabilisation, low financial support  
- Low skills with development or innovative organisations |
4 Topics and main activities for Competence Centres

The next step for the needs assessment was a group work on specific topics, which were collected and clustered in a first session.
The needs concerning the different means of support (e.g. training, policy dialogue) had been summarized under "functions of CCs" (chap. 5), and five groups were established to discuss 5 main topics on:

1. SME Development /Marketing of products
2. Support to value chains in agriculture and food industry
3. Support to local communities
4. Green Wealth / Economy
5. Natural Resource Management

The groups elaborated an overview for each topic with regards to the following aspects:

- Topics of expertise
- Key activities (e.g. research, training...)
- Project activities, ideas
- Other possible characteristics

4.1 Working Group 1 - SME Development /Marketing of products

Production, processing and marketing of traditional, local and regional products is one of the priorities of the European Agriculture Policy for 2014-2020. Due to high competition and low prices of commodities the production of high value products is only possible if agriculture producers and local or regional SMEs in the food processing are working closely together. The assurance of quality standards, the monitoring and controlling of the value chains from production to the consumer is a specific challenge especially for small businesses. They have to adopt modern technologies on logistics, food processing, information and communication technologies. The marketing strategies for SMEs in the sector need to be based on a well elaborated marketing strategy, which is jointly implemented by all members of the value chain. Networking and trust of the actors are essential for the success of such initiatives.

Group 1 highlighted the need for surveys, research, capacity building and policy advice in the field. Linking the SMEs and facilitation of cooperation, study tours and training measures are only some project ideas related to the subject.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of expertise</th>
<th>Key activities</th>
<th>Project ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal advice for SMEs</td>
<td>Survey of needs of SMEs</td>
<td>Best case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing support for farmers and producers</td>
<td>Research based on SMEs needs</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional food, geographic identification</td>
<td>Education &amp; training</td>
<td>Consulting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support in project management</td>
<td>Thematic trips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linking agriculture with tourism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support in policy &amp; regulations</td>
<td>Seminars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Connecting SMEs with other stakeholders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Working Group 2 - Support to value chains in agriculture and food industry

Strongly linked to the Topic of working group 1 is the topic of quality assurance with regards to food safety, impact on the environment, energy efficiency and functional food. The working group has focused on the technical side of food production and food processing. The key activities in this field will be dealing with product innovation, food laboratory and food clinics. Furthermore the impact of food production and food processing on environment with regards to waste management, sustainable resource management will need to be tackle in this field of interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of expertise</th>
<th>Key activities</th>
<th>Project ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality and safety of food</td>
<td>Bridging PAS transforming in to innovation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment &amp; energy efficiency</td>
<td>Food production laboratory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning and market</td>
<td>Food clinics tradition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy Food</td>
<td>Strategic planning and market</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>General services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality &amp; healthy food</td>
<td>Reduction of environmental impact</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic planning and market</td>
<td>Management of by-products &amp; waste</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable agriculture in food production</td>
<td>Sustainable agriculture in food production</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3 Working Group 3 - Support to local communities

Working group 3 focused in the assessment on the role of SMEs in the development of local communities. Social infrastructure, the preservation of diversity and cultural heritage, sustainable tourism are some of the topics in the field. The key activities of a Competence centre is related to the SME development in the private but also in the public sector, where common market regulations are not functioning or where a cooperation between the public and the private sector is essential for the economic development of rural areas. This can include the capitalisation of cultural markers, customs, skills, etc. This could mean support to public-private partnership initiatives or capacity building measures for SMEs and the diversification of rural economy.

**Topics of expertise**
- Role of SMEs in the rural exodus
- Social infrastructure
- Rural infrastructure
- Preservation and diversity of cultural heritage
- Develop social capital starting from CC network
- Farmer cooperatives and vertical cooperation
- Sustainable tourism

**Key activities**
- Dissemination of information of good practices
- Ongoing training to public authorities
- Capitalising of cultural markers (dialects, skills, customs, local products.)
- Supporting the development of projects
- Fundraising for cooperatives and other community based organisations
- Help to local SMEs to become touristic attractive
- Support for clustering
- Supporting the planning process
- Support the community development (networking)
- Help to establish and maintain the cooperatives
- Diversification of rural activities
- Career advisory
- Training needs assessment
- Advise/ support the use of seeds, techniques, local knowledge – climate change

**Project ideas**
- Support for the development of projects
- Capitalisation of cultural markers (dialects, skills, customs, local products.)
- Dissemination of information of good practices
- Ongoing training to public authorities
- Fundraising for cooperatives and other community based organisations
- Help to local SMEs to become touristic attractive
- Support for clustering
- Supporting the planning process
- Support the community development (networking)
- Help to establish and maintain the cooperatives
- Diversification of rural activities
- Career advisory
- Training needs assessment
- Advise/ support the use of seeds, techniques, local knowledge – climate change
4.4 Working Group 4 - Green Wealth / Economy

The diversification of rural economy will have to follow new approaches and innovative ideas to fully valorise the natural resources. Renewable energy and modern technology for the use of biomass will be one of the key sectors for economic growth and income in rural areas in the future.

The proposal for a COUNCIL REGULATION on the Bio-Based Industries Joint Undertaking states that "the bio-based industry value chains (ranging from primary production, biorefineries, industrial users to consumer brands) are complex and so are the technological and innovation challenges that need to be overcome to unlock its socio-economic and environmental potential. Only a strong strategic vision, a well-structured and defined research and innovation agenda and a long-term stable financial commitment can bring together in one programme the different competences from across Europe to achieve the necessary breakthroughs and provide sufficient certainty and critical mass to leverage significant private investments."

The working group outlined the need for intensive research, transfer of technology and information as well as business oriented legislation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of expertise</th>
<th>Key activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Green wealth/ economy</td>
<td>Bio based business legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biomass use for energy</td>
<td>Consultancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A technical/ chemical use of biomass</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial use of biomass</td>
<td>Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research and development for rural bio based economy
- Identifying needs
- Networking
- Facilitating
- Biomass resources
- Bat
- New products

Waste management
Bio based technology and information transfer
- Development of education programs and training
- Conferences & workshops
- Publications

Project ideas

Other

[Diagram showing various topics and key activities related to green wealth and bio-based industries]
4.5 Working Group 5 - Natural Resource Management

A cross cutting topic is the management of natural resources. Group 5 elaborated a comprehensive overview on the expertise, key activities and project ideas. The relevant topics range from climate change, environmental impact of agriculture production, soil and water management. Research, education and policy advice are considered as key activities in the field.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of expertise</th>
<th>Key activities</th>
<th>Project ideas</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural resource management</td>
<td>Research(max involvement of SME, farmers)</td>
<td>Landraces growing promotion</td>
<td>Legal entity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change (mitigation and adoption)</td>
<td>Education(local administration, increasing public awareness)</td>
<td>Exploration of genetic resources for increasing agriculture production and preservative biodiversity</td>
<td>Communication of OEP to end users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduction of environmental footprint in agricultural products</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Organisation and optimisation of agronomy practise</td>
<td>new ideas - mutual projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biodiversity (evaluation, promotion, preservation)</td>
<td>Policy decision</td>
<td>Good agriculture practise targeting water protection</td>
<td>joint ventures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil management (fertilizers, pesticides..)</td>
<td>coaching</td>
<td>Reduction of the impact of agriculture on greenhouse gas emission</td>
<td>technology incubators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate change adaptation solutions/ techniques</td>
<td>Expert outsourcing(Gs)</td>
<td>Wellbeing in the Danube floodplains nuisance and disease prevention and control</td>
<td>spin-offs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water management (diffuse pollution reduction)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>students internship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health for human &amp; plants, animals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transmittable &amp; zootoxic diseases nuisance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Functions of a Competence Centre

What should a competence centre provide regards research and knowledge transfer to private and public stakeholders with respect to **functions of a Competence Centre**. Four key functions were identified - brokerage of knowledge, networking, interface between applied research and producers and policy dialogue.

**Brokerage of knowledge**

- Excellence/ competence in a specific topic relevant for rural economy
- Focus on excellence in education
- Interdisciplinary research approaches
- Each centre should combine the best capacities
- Human resource development in rural areas best practice
- Vocational training

**Networking**
- Involvement and commitment of private public stakeholders
- Stakeholders dialogue in agri-food value chain
- Inter regional communication and cooperation
- Publicity work on regional rural development

**Interface between applied research & producers**
- Services how to gain financial independence and attract funds
- Developing project proposals and knowhow to do so
- Support access to financial sources for SMEs to support economic development

**Policy dialogue**
- Strategy on future new arts in agricultural production
- Support and advice for policy making processes
- Monitoring of public policy
- Facilitating discussion on SME policy
6 Next Steps: Feasibility Studies

For the further steps Thomas Wehinger gave an overview of work schedule of the project until June 2014.

The feasibility studies will be implemented focusing on the following content:

1. Key competences and tasks of the CC
   - Demand for research, advisory, training and information
   - Impact, objectives, results and activities
   - Defining key target groups for the activities

2. Organisational structure and financial sources
   - Identifying partners, organisations and stakeholder
   - Draft and discuss the organisational structure of the CC
   - Draft and discuss sources of finances and commitment of stakeholder
   - Describe the legal aspects to be considered

3. Role of the CC in the international network incl. activities

4. A minimum of 2 project proposals for funding from different sources shall be described

5. Workshop with local, regional and national stakeholder

6. Report and proposal on future steps is due end of May 2013

In addition Thomas Wehinger presented a draft content of the project report summarizing the 5 single feasibility studies, which will have to be delivered until June, to allow the overall report until July 2014.

1. Summary / introduction to CCs and the network
   - Demand for research, advisory, training and information
   - Impact, objectives, results and activities
   - Defining key target groups for the activities
   - Role the international network incl. activities

2. Country reports or summary of the feasibility studies
   - Partner 1
   - Partner 2
   - Etc.

3. Overview of the project proposals
   - Of the network in the whole
   - Of individual network partners

4. Further steps to approach the demand
Following the work schedule of the project the organisational and financial framework of the project was described. Overall ideas is the to establish CCs in the partner countries with future financial support of the EU programmes available and coordinated by the Danube Strategy 2014-2020.

As a basic idea outlined in the introduction, each of the centres should have a certain specification as well as a range of general services, which include topics that are at all locations of the same relevance and with highly overlapping content.

The feasibility study serves as a start-up support for designing the CCs and their network structure. Analyses and insights from country experts are needed to detect the most promising complementary topics for the different CCs, how already existing expertise and competences can be used and which institutions should or need to be involved.

The participants of the kick-off meeting expressed the interest in the elaboration of the feasibility studies with the following "LEAD"-partners to take responsibility:

1. Bulgaria - SME Development for Marketing of products
2. Serbia / Romania - Support to value chains in agriculture and food industry
3. Slovenia and Croatia - Support to local communities
4. Hungary - Green Wealth and Economy & Slovakia
5. Romania with Hungary and Slovakia - Natural Resource Management

Additionally already existing ideas will be also addressed and partners already working on the realisation of CC (e.g. Osijek: Healthy Food Chain) / involved need to be part of the consultation process.

The elaboration of the studies is foreseen within 4-5 months. The money available will be shared equally between the contributing partners. The financial means may not cover all costs arising, therefore "contribution in kind" and "high motivation" will be needed to elaborate outstanding project proposals for 2014-2020.

Roughly the financial means may cover a part time position (30-50%) for 4-5 months, considering regional salaries for the calculation. Terms of reference and a contract base will be elaborated by the Eastern Europe Centre and coordinated with Thomas Wehinger, who will be assigned for the coordination of the studies and will be responsible for the overall compilation of the feasibility study.

Part of the further steps is also to conduct local workshops to discuss the findings of the feasibility studies and develop first recommendations on the location and partner structure of CCs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning for the next steps</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Workshop documentation and summary of results and open questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Clarify the tasks for feasibility studies and interviews in the countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assignments of short term experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7 Participants

This chapter combines the list of participants and a brief information about the presented institutions.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina**

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**Sabina Hadziametovic**, Dipl.inž.građ.
Centre for Environmentally Sustainable Development (CESD)
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Faculty of Agriculture and Food Sciences,
University of Sarajevo
http://www.ppf.unsa.ba/en/About
The faculty exist about 70 years and aims on the improvement of domestic agro and food production complex, as well as the rural areas. Research interest and international cooperation include e.g. industry and company competitiveness; Public policies and transfer of knowledge; Foreign trade performance of BH agribusiness; Safety and Quality Management in food industry; Quality perception and consumers behaviour; Quality management in high education and R&D

Centre for Environmentally Sustainable Development (CESD)
http://www.coor.ba
Non-profit organization registered as an association of citizens with the aim of establishing effective links and cooperation between the academic staff from various universities in BiH and the region and to promote environmental protection. In promoting environmentally sustainable development the projects and activities target on education, environmental protection, pollution prevention, nature conservation and sustainable tourism development.

**Slovak Republic**

**Igor Šurina**, Dr. Ing.
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**Štefan Šutý**, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ing.
Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Faculty of Chemical and Food Technology
Email: stefan.suty@stuba.sk

Slovak University of Technology in Bratislava, Faculty of Chemical and Food Technology
http://www.fchpt.stuba.sk/
The research potential of the faculty includes basic scientific fields of chemistry, chemical and biochemical technology, food processing and applied physics, informatics and mathematics
Bulgaria

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Ivaylo Hristoforov
BSC SME Ruse
Email: bsc@smebg.net

Nikola Goranov
Human Resources Development Agency
Email: hrda@smebg.net

Kalin Minev
Human Resources Development Agency
Email: hrda@smebg.net

Dimitar Yakimov, Ass.Prof.
University for Agribusiness and Rural Development (UARD)
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Business Support Centre for Small and Medium Enterprises – Ruse, Bulgaria (BSC SME)
www.bsc.smebg.net
Non-governmental and non-profit organization, registered in 1996, to support the business in the North Central Region of Bulgaria; Member of the Danube Strategy Steering Groups for priority areas 7, 8 and 9; only regular member in Bulgaria of EURADA – European Association of Regional Development Agencies; consultation in regional development and strategic planning. BSC SME has experience with the first business incubator in Bulgaria, financial instruments including small agricultural loans, Enterprise EU network/ SME feedback on EU policy and with foreign investors.

Human Resources Development Agency (HRDA)
http://hrda.smebg.net/en/
HRDA is a non-profit association, established in 2004 in the city of Ruse. The Agency specializes in supporting the social integration and personal realization by increasing the effectiveness of job search, the competitiveness of workforce on the labour market and by improvement of qualification and vocational training of the workforce. HRDA can provide experiences with vocational training, situation analyses in Bulgaria (education and other) and Regional Development programming.

University for Agribusiness and Rural Development (UARD)
Ruse University has a large agricultural faculty and a new branch in Agribusiness and Rural Development.
Croatia

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trepreneurship
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Marina Tomic
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Agriculture,
Department of Marketing in Agriculture
Email: matomic@agr.hr

Faculty of Agriculture
University of Josip Strossmayer in Osijek
http://www.pfos.hr/eng/
Founded in 1960, the faculty includes currently 53 full
professors, 19 associated professors and about 110
other staff. The faculty vision is to become leading re-
search and educational institution in the field of biotech-
nical sciences in the region. One IPA project was the
“Technology-Innovation Centre with Incubator for the
Development of Rural Economy and Entrepreneurship”.
Currently ongoing is the application for a “Centre of
Competence Healthy Food Chain” with several partners
at Josip Strossmayer University, Agricultural Institute
Osijek, Croatian Food Agency, five counties, Cities of
Osijek and Vinkovci, Reg. Dev. Agency of Slavonia and
Baranja, Croatian National Competitiveness Cluster for
Food Processing, Reg. Cluster of beekeepers Osijek.

Faculty of Agriculture
University of Zagreb
http://www.agr.unizg.hr/index_eng.htm
From the 28 departments (318 employees), the depart-
ment of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development,
of Management and Rural Entrepreneurship and of Mar-
keting in Agriculture are directly engaged in Rural Devel-
opment. Research project examples are ‘farmers coop-
eratives – level of social capital’ and ‘responsible use of
soil, water, land and regional development’. Projects on
community level, targeted on farmers cluster for products
from Croatian villages, a dairy cooperative, rural tourism
and preservation of indigenous varieties (grape, vine).
Germany

Hans Peter Herdlitschka, Dr.
Ministry of Finances and Economics Baden-Wuerttemberg, Economic Policy and Foreign Economics
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Angelika Thomas, Dr. sc. agr.
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Thomas Wehinger
NACCON GbR
Email: wehinger@naccon.de

Ministry of Finances and Economics
Baden-Wuerttemberg
http://groupsaces.com/Competitiveness/
The Ministry of Finance and Economics Baden-Württemberg, Baden-Württemberg, Germany coordinates together with the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Crafts, Croatia EUSDR Priority Area 8 “Competitiveness”. See Annex 8.2 for given information on the Danube strategy and working group.

Eastern Europe Centre (OEZ)
University of Hohenheim
https://oez.uni-hohenheim.de/
The Eastern Europe Centre is a cross-disciplinary centres at the University of Hohenheim. The University has an international strong agricultural faculty and strives for excellence within the research fields in bio-economy. The OEZ coordinates since more than 15 years cooperation projects with Universities/ Academies in Middle, Eastern and South-Eastern countries

NACCON GbR
http://www.naccon.de/ENU/1_phoilo.html
**Hungary**

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**József Horváth**, Dr.
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**Rita Szekeresné Köteles**
EPD Consulting Ltd.
Email: szkrita@gmail.com

The Faculty of Agriculture (Hódmezővásárhely) with about 90 staff members is one of 12 faculties of the University of Szeged. Activities are mainly education, research and practical training but also extension service and services for the community.

**EPD Consulting Ltd.**

Consultancies, project management, training and publications in the area of rural development processes (local action groups) and sustainable development.

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**Romania**

**Radu Sumalan**, Prof. Dr.
Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michal I of Romania" from Timisoara, Department Plant Physiology
Email: sumalanagro@yahoo.com

**Ciulca, Sorin**, Eng.
Banat's University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michal I of Romania" from Timisoara
Email: c_i_sorin@yahoo.com

**Cosmin Salasan**, Ass. Prof. Dr.
Banat University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine "King Michal I of Romania" from Timisoara
Email: cosminsalasan@gmail.com

The Faculty of Agriculture is the oldest faculty at the university. The presentation “Biotechnologies applied for a Biobased Economy” showed the different activities in growing and treating biomass e.g. in the pilot biodiesel station. Several research topics target on biofuels. Partners are the Romanian Sustainable Energy Cluster (ROSEN), the Local Action Group of the association “Timis-Torontal-Barzawa” and the Politechnica University of Timisoara’
Serbia

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Branko T. Ćupina, Prof. Dr.
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Agriculture
Email: nauka@polj.uns.ac.rs

Dusan Petric, Prof. Dr.
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Agriculture, Institute for Environmental and Plant Protection "Dr Pavle Vukasovic”, Email: dusanp@polj.uns.ac.rs

Dejan Janković, Assistant Professor
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Email: jankovic@polj.uns.ac.rs

Nebojša Ilić, Dr.
University of Novi Sad, Institute of Food Technology in Novi Sad, Email: nebojsa.ili@fins.uns.ac.rs

Faculty of Agriculture, University of Belgrade
Institute of Agricultural Economics
http://www.agrif.bg.ac.rs/
The Institute of Agricultural Economics is involved in a range of international, fundamental research, technology development and bilateral cooperation projects. They concerned for example the implementation of a area based development approach in the Western Balkans, training networks, Agricultural policy or – with respect to technology development – new and traditional food technology and food safety.

Faculty of Agriculture, University of Novi Sad
http://www.uns.ac.rs/en/
The University is Novi Sad is the second largest university in the country. The faculty of agriculture encompasses eight departments, runs several international R&D and Tempus projects and counts 31 contracts for international cooperation. Reference projects to SIRA DANUBE concern sustainable agriculture and rural development, the agricultural extension system. National projects are with partners from the Ministry level, the provinces or local communities.

Institute of Food Technology in Novi Sad (FINS), University of Novi Sad
http://www.fins.uns.ac.rs/
FINS is one of the two science and research institutes of the University of Novi Sad and also involved in international and national projects. In the area of rural development FINS is currently involved in projects to support small meat processing plants with high quality products to improve production quality and capacity. Previously FINS coordinated a project for the Integrated Regional Development Plan e.g. to develop production and control systems in the area of food quality and safety.
Branislav Malagurski, PhD  
Regional SMEE Development Agency,  
Email: bmalagurski@yahoo.com, bmalagurski@smer-su.org

Dejan Šebic,  
Farmers union/ association "Vojvodina AGRAR"  
Email: sebic.dejan@gmail.com

Regional Centre for SMEE Development Subotica (SMER), Serbia and Montenegro  
http://www.smer.biz  
Regional Centre for the development of SMEE Subotica – SMER was established on December 11th 2001. The agency provides support for the development of small and medium enterprises and entrepreneurship through consulting, education and regional or international projects. Examples are an INTERREG IIIA neighbourhood programme Hungary – Serbia, “TICAD”, the IPA funded Cross-border Network for Innovative Development of Economies and Knowledge Transfer, and – Tisa Catchment Area Development and an

Farmers union/ association "Vojvodina AGRAR"  
http://vojvodina-agrar.com/  
Registered in 2005, Vojvodina Agriculture is the primary association of agricultural producers. Activities target on achieving an acceptable business environment for agricultural producters, manuufacturers of industrial products, especially in relation to the processing industry.

Slovenia

Aleš Kuhar, Assoc. Prof.  
University of Ljubljana, Biotechnical Faculty, Department of Animal Science  
Email: Ales.kuhar@bf.uni-lj.si

University of Ljubljana, Biotechnical Faculty, Department of Animal Science  
http://www.bf.uni-lj.si  
Related topic three working areas are outlined: Agricultural Policy, Food Industry and Farm Management. Under the header food industry the topics are marketing analyses, price, quality labels, sensor analysis, health/salt, as well as activities in knowledge transfer. The faculty works for and with governmental bodies, EU partners, associations and companies.
8 Annex: Presentations and Inputs

8.1 EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)

Dr. Herdlitschka explained the background of the Danube Strategy, the priority areas and the working groups, which are illustrated below. Base of the activities in PA 8 is the Action Plan, which was developed with the support of the EU-Commission and was adopted by the 14 member states of the Danube strategy.
The recommendation from side of the PA8 coordination is to get involved in the working and steering groups as they are part a possibility to influence ongoing discussions. Important criteria for the success of all activities will be to develop concrete project ideas.

Links and background information:

The action plan and more material can be found:
under official documents
resp. in English (or choose another language)

Priority are 8 has an one workspace, which can be found here:
[http://groupspaces.com/Competitiveness/](http://groupspaces.com/Competitiveness/)
8.2 Project Presentation

**SIRA DANUBE: Competence Centres „Smart and Innovative Rural Areas“**

**Project within Priority Area 8: “To support the competitiveness of enterprises, including cluster development, rural areas”**

**PA8, Working Group 5**

Competitiveness in Rural and Urban Areas, to support:
- innovative and competitively viable rural development
- economic diversification & business development esp. for SMEs
- professionalised rural knowledge and innovation system

**Project Goals and Objectives**

- Initiation of 3-5 competence centres “Smart and Innovative Rural Areas” in the EU Danube region at universities and/or other educational institutions in the field of agriculture, natural resource protection, bio-energy, rural development
- Embedding the competence centres within a trans-regional network of partners from further vocational and higher education, enterprises, associations in rural areas and others
- Establishing the competence centres as a platform for knowledge-, innovation- and technology transfer to bridge science and economy including SMEs (small and middle sized enterprises)

**Project Phases and Milestones**

Phase: 2013-2014
- Milestone 1: Initiation of SIRA centres, feasibility and concept elaboration ➔ preparation

Phase: 2014-2020
- Milestone 2: Establishment of 3-5 SIRA centres ➔ seeding
- Milestone 3: Realization of the operational and functional performance of the centres through project acquisition and implementation ➔ cultivation
- Milestone 4: Expansion of the activities into other regions and institutionalisation of a cluster of competence centres ➔ spreading

**Background**

**PA8 Flagship Projekt**

EU Danube Strategy
- joint Action plan of 14 member states
- 11 Priority Areas (PA)
- PA 8 Competitiveness
- 6 Working Groups
  - WG 1: Innovation and Technology Transfer
  - WG 2: Cluster of Excellence
  - WG 3: Vocational Training
  - WG 4: Entrepreneurial Learning
  - WG 5: Competitiveness in Rural and Urban Areas
  - WG 6: Environmental Technology and Energy Efficiency

**Project Phases and Milestones**

Phase: 2013-2014
- Milestone 1: Initiation of SIRA centres, feasibility and concept elaboration ➔ preparation

Phase: 2014-2020
- Milestone 2: Establishment of 3-5 SIRA centres ➔ seeding
- Milestone 3: Realization of the operational and functional performance of the centres through project acquisition and implementation ➔ cultivation
- Milestone 4: Expansion of the activities into other regions and institutionalisation of a cluster of competence centres ➔ spreading
**Milestone I: 2013-2014**

- **07/2013**: Final approval and official start
- **07-10/2013**: Partner identification and consultation (university and other network partners)
- **10/2013**: Kick-off workshop (brainstorming/discussion on scope, content, organization, location and network of future SIRA centres)
- **10/2013 - 06/2014**: Feasibility studies in selected countries (research and training demand, target groups, legal and financial aspects, key organisations and add. partners, funding opportunities) and concept development for the centres (organisation, programme, network, partners...)
- **07/2014**: Report and proposal on future steps

---

**Kick-off, Osijek October 2013**

**Workshop Objectives**

- Specify the needs and thematic working areas for future SIRA DANUBE competence centres
- Elaborate a common understanding on the profile and concept of the competence centres (focus areas, key activities, location, partners)
- Exchange and start of a partner network
- Clarification of next steps and working tasks

**Programme parts**

- **Role of the higher education institutions in the agricultural and rural knowledge and innovation system:** “What are the strengths and weaknesses to contribute to innovation and economic viability in rural areas?” Group work & presentation
- **Needs assessment for centres of competence:** What are the demands for research and know-how development and for thematic working areas? Brainstorming, group work & presentation
- **Outline of SIRA DANUBE Competence Centres:** Which are the:
  - Topics to focus on? - key activities to implement?
  - Possible locations to start? - Other characteristics to clarify?

**Next Steps**

- Until 01/2014: Preparation of feasibility studies (what: demand/needs assessment, target groups, legal & financial aspects, cooperation approaches; who: short term consultants in the partner countries, whom to contact: resource persons and contacts)
- Until 03/2014: Conduction of feasibility studies in selected countries; identification of funding opportunities
- Until 05/2014: Further concept development for the centres (organisation, programme, network, partners...): conduction of country workshops to discuss results of the studies and develop an action plan to establish CC
- 07/2014: Report and proposal on future steps

**Meaning for the next steps**

- Workshop documentation and summary of results and open questions
- Clarify the tasks for feasibility studies and interviews in the countries
- Assignments of short term experts