Application Form

European Entrepreneurial Region Award

2018

REGION OF CENTRAL MACEDONIA
1. Fact sheet

General information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the territory</th>
<th>Region of Central Macedonia, Greece</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date of application</td>
<td>07/04/2017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political endorsement</td>
<td>Mr. Apostolos Tzitzikostas, Regional Governor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mr. Savvakis Athanasios, President of Federation of Industries of Northern Greece (FING)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Regional data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NUTS code</th>
<th>EL52</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GDP/inhabitant (year)</td>
<td>12,500 (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1,881,869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP growth rate (year)</td>
<td>-1.3% (2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area in km²</td>
<td>19,166 km²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment rate (year)</td>
<td>26% (2015)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion Policy category</td>
<td>Transition region □ Less developed region</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contact details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contact person</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postal address</td>
<td>198 Vas. Olgas Avenue, Thessaloniki, Greece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pkm.gov.gr">www.pkm.gov.gr</a></td>
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</table>

The territorial EER strategy in a nutshell

Please provide a brief synopsis of your EER strategy (including the added value of the EER award for your territory) in a maximum of 200 words.

EER strategy is one of the main tools that the Regional Authority picked in order to reverse the GDP per capita huge sinking that reached almost 30% since the financial crisis started in 2008. 26% unemployment rate, large amount of Brain Drain, cash flow suffocation, enterprises closing down and an increase in social inequalities jeopardizing social cohesion are the most important challenges that must be handled. RCM has decided to confront these sustainably in the future by supporting entrepreneurship: lessening the administrative burden, coping with the huge problem of cash flow that hampers SMEs when financing their activities, nurturing them to integrate technological and non-technological innovation, boost them to become more competitive & reach foreign markets and guide them to participate in actions like EU platforms to sustain competitive advantages and relationships around the world. Implementing these actions is crucial since budgets are limited and crisis calls for more relief measures than long-term visioning. To make sure that both strategic mindsets work perfect RCM has decided to use four strategies: (1) co-plan, and co-implement the actions along stakeholders, (2) offer support to SMEs in every point of their life-cycle, (3) leverage public with private capital and (4) increase innovative level of all SMEs.

How did you learn about the EER 2018 call?

- CoR website
- E-mail announcement from the CoR
- EWRC
- Announcement in CoR Plenary/Commission meeting
- Other CoR event
- Info table at CoR Plenary
- Other (please specify):
2. Political vision

The Region:
Central Macedonia has a long experience in bottom-up strategic planning and stakeholder involvement. A series of pilot projects were designed and executed collaboratively and some of them scaled-up and funded by the Regional Operational Program. The region concentrates a significant number of entrepreneurs, institutions and actors that can actively take part in planning and implementing the EER strategy. We recommend the design of a comprehensive decision making and management structure for our EER strategy and a specific Division of RCM’s organizational structure chart that along with the rest of stakeholders will be setting priorities and implementing the EER action plan.

The Vision:
Our development model and mind set through this extremely tough times is dual: Implement crisis management tools to ease financial problems and societal challenges that have arisen due to financial crisis and capital controls (the first lasting almost a decade now), and at the same time plan, vision and execute long term strategic actions in order to guide the region in a period characterized by a sustainable business model, lower unemployment rates, and a more coherent and prosperous society. Our Vision for the next decade could be condensed in the following: we want Region of Central Macedonia to be one of the leading entrepreneurial and innovative regions in South Eastern Europe, based on RTDI, empowering the ecosystem, strengthening the links between the four helixes (industry, research, government and society) and finally increase the development of new, or the improvement of existing tradeable products and services to be able to compete in the global markets sustainably. This will be creating value that will eventually increase income and decrease brain drain. We are trying to move from the Passive and Reactive model to a more Pre-active (prepare) but mainly to a more Proactive (create) one.

The SWOT analysis below is based on the Contextual Scanning & Assessment and on the EER strategic planning consultations and discussions between regional actors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Broad range of economic activities covering all sectors. The size of the secondary sector makes the region the second industrial center of the country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Plenty entrepreneurship competitions for students and young start-uppers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Interactive Electronic Participation Platform <a href="http://e-dialogos.pkm.gov.gr">http://e-dialogos.pkm.gov.gr</a> which constitutes a new innovative open public dialogue platform.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A new Independent Division for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support in RCM organizational chart.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Independent Office of the Regional Ombudsman for Citizens and Enterprises.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The integration of RCM in the European Interregional Cooperation Program «INTERREG EUROPE» for the purpose of the development of circular economy and how it can help SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities (CESME &amp; BIOREGIO Projects)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Early 2017 was signed an agreement for cooperation between the Region of Central Macedonia and the CERN institute for technology transfer, commercialization and tenders.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High concentration of R&amp;D organizations and private sector infrastructure initiatives supporting innovation (clusters and incubators).</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The main urban area of the region, Thessaloniki has been developing as an open innovative space, nurturing creativity, supporting start-ups, and generally boosts entrepreneurial spirit and networking</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>WEAKNESSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Lack of a clear economic development model at regional level, despite the efforts of the last few years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Negative Growth Definition: Huge decrease in GDP per inhabitant in RCM the past years (-28%,14vs08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Traditional productive labor intensive sectors and medium and low technology intensity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| • Desertification of many industrial areas once branded as best practices i.e. Kilkis Business Area, with ripple
negative effects and weakness exploitation of their comparative advantages.

- Dramatic reduction of private and public investments.
- A high number of very small SMEs, who lack the ability to embody innovative activities dominates the regional business profile (low absorptive capacity for innovation adoption and know-how, technology transfer from business sector), and leads to low global competitiveness advantages
- SMEs economic activity appears over-concentrated in the Metropolitan Area of Thessaloniki.
- Most R&D employment and expenditure concern higher education and government, while business receive the lowest percentages.
- In terms of energy used resources, there is a clear dependence on lignite and oil compared to RES.
- Absence of a brand name in almost all regional priority sectors and problematic access to foreign markets.
- Lack of guidance and a low level of technical training and lifelong learning programs.
- Brain drain of highly educated graduates and skilled personnel, mainly in STEM.

**OPPORTUNITIES**

- One of the main target markets for the products and services of regional SMEs is the Balkans peninsula. Many countries have been showing growth and an increase in demand for many products and services. Local companies have had traditional good ties with these countries and a steady high value brand name.
- State is promoting institutional reforms, reducing red tape, promoting more transparent public tendering and liberalizing markets, opens new opportunities for small SMEs.
- A new national e-Procurement portal and procedure is taking off.
- European and national environmental policy, offers opportunities to SMEs to focus on.
- New programming period 2014 – 2020, will increase funding and opportunities in many sectors, both regionally and nationally.
- A number of EU funded programs and initiatives will be opening in the next years offering all stakeholders and SMEs a change to increase their funding alternatives.
- Lower labor costs offers local SMEs the opportunity to increase their competitiveness in a various markets, even high skilled ones like ICT

**THREATS**

- Complex legislation and tax national system (instability and frequent changes)
- Due to economic crisis, the great majority of funding originates from public sources.
- Lack of stable economic conditions and policies to attract private investments from domestic and abroad.
- Increasing competition in the context of the new EU accession countries.
- High degree of brain drain.
- Reducing the demand for goods and services due to the prolonged economic recession at national level.
- A new global trend of more tariffs and barriers in global trade, could affect our business model and our resilient capacity, to react.
3. Governance and partnership

The governance system of the EER actions is designed to ensure effective coordination of central government agencies and all regional actors and regional government, to ensure regional strategies interact and interlinked with national strategies for EER actions. Its main attributes are: (a) directly interfaces with the ROP System of Governance, since most of the funding for EER actions are coming form that sources, so it is considered to be directly applicable, efficient and functional and (b) is linked with the RIS3 strategy and governance since EER considers innovation to be in important element in boosting SMEs competitiveness, and access to markets.

EER governance adopts a four-level model which is structured in the following levels: a) Strategic level, on policy and decision making, b) Coordination & Management level, concerning the documentation, coordination and implementation of situations existing policy, c) the Executive Level, which is responsible for the preparation and implementation of the action plan, d) Stakeholders’ engagement level, that includes the parties and stakeholders involved in the design, evaluation and review of EER Strategy.

The region concentrates a significant number of institutions and actors that can actively take part in the design and implementation of the EER Strategy. We recommend the creation of a comprehensive decision and management structure for EER Strategy to steer the process of entrepreneurial discovery, the setting of priorities and implementing the actions. The figure below shows the local, regional and national level of cooperation relationship in EER strategy. Participatory aspect is crucial for the successful implementation of EER strategy and action plan.

![Figure 1: The RCMs’ EER Governance](image)

The addition of the “Strategic dimension”, composed of the political representatives (Regional Council and Regional Governor) was deemed necessary to connect the regional dimension to the national and European ones. The strategic level also includes Chambers and Development Agencies, bodies which are directly connected with entrepreneurship. In the next level, the coordinating and management role for the implementation of the strategy has the existing Independent Division of Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support of the RCM. The whole implementation of the EER actions automatically linked to the implementation of ROP actions from the relevant department of the RCM. The participatory level includes informal and formal networks of the entrepreneurial ecosystem multi helix. The integration of this level gives an opportunity for the regions’ entrepreneurial ecosystem to act as a catalyst throughout the programming period 2014-2020.
4. Action plan

A. The entrepreneurship ecosystem in RCM

The programs and projects related to EER in the entrepreneurship ecosystem

The economy of RCM is consisted largely by SMEs that can be found in traditional industries with low productivity rates, innovation embodiment and global competitiveness. The degree of production and knowledge-intensive services and technology is particularly low as well as the export performance. During the last decade the unprecedented economic crisis has magnified the structural problems that SMEs are dealing with, such as difficulties in raising funding to scale-up, develop and embody RTDI activities, and access European and global markets. Entrepreneurial culture and activities among young people, women, and University graduates are very low, mainly towards knowledge-intensive industries and technology that entail high risks. Both the new Regional Operational Program 2014-2020, the Regional Innovation Strategy, and a number of other activities and projects that have initiated by the Regional Authority and other stakeholders, and funded by SF, Horizon 2020, Interreg programs etc, have set entrepreneurship and job growth as two of their key priorities.

In detail, the actions of the RCM that have been already designed to enhance entrepreneurship and support EER Strategy implementation and SBA principles promotion and will consist our starting point are:

- Supporting entrepreneurship by the Operational Program of Central Macedonia (ROP). The Program aims to boost economic development and create job opportunities in Central Macedonia. It contributes to achieve the Europe 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, also in line with the Smart Specialization Strategy. Its main goals are to create jobs and help SMEs to become more competitive and innovation-driven.
- Moreover, the Regional Authority of Central Macedonia prioritize the enhancing of SMEs competitiveness, under its ROP, Priority Axis 3 (available budget €104m). The aim of the policy instrument is to utilize the enormous potentials for cost savings and for gaining higher productivity, thus enabling companies to become more competitive and better positioned in the global value chains, by transferring knowledge and good practices.

The ROP is fully contributing to the vast majority of EU goals. A short analysis of the OP:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>ERDF – % of budget allocation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Strengthening research, technological development and innovation</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Enhancing access to, and use and quality of, ICT</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enhancing competitiveness of SMEs</td>
<td>10.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Promoting climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management</td>
<td>7.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Preserving and protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency</td>
<td>12.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Promoting sustainable transport and removing bottlenecks in key network infrastructures</td>
<td>37.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination - ERDF</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and any discrimination - ESF</td>
<td>15.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning</td>
<td>3.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Expected impacts of the Central Macedonia OP are the following:
- Support of more than 900 SMEs & cooperation of more than 400 SMEs with RTDI institutions.
- Creation of 1,300 new jobs.
- Improved anti-flood measures for additional 300,000 inhabitants and upgraded transport networks for additional 445,000 persons.
- Annual energy savings of 160 KtOE (Kiloton of Oil Equivalent) and protection of additional 530,000ha Natura sites.
Support of 35 business plans for social enterprises creating 175 employment positions and social inclusion measures covering 1,000 disabled people and 6,500 immigrants.

• Supporting innovative entrepreneurship by designing, updating and implementing the regional **Research and Innovation Strategies for Smart Specialization (RIS3)** in accordance with the new EU 2020 strategy on smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The four regional specialization Champion Sectors that have been identified as they participating decisively in Gross Added Value of the region, employing a significant number of workers, maintaining critical mass and exhibiting intrinsic dynamics and extroversion are: Agro-food, Tourism, Textile & Clothing and Construction Materials.

Additional **projects** supporting the RIS3 strategy are the Horizon 2020 project **ONLINE S3** (by offering tools and applications for the designing or updating and implementation of RIS3) and Interreg Europe project **HIGHER** (Better Policy Instruments for High Innovation Projects in the European Regions).

• RCM has managed to use Interreg Europe program in order to fund a number of important actions. Two of them are directly linked to **IX SBA Principle**. Specifically:

The **CESME-Circular Economy for SMEs** project addresses SME inclusion in the circular economy, and how it can help SMEs to turn environmental challenges into opportunities. The CESME partnership hopes to introduce new circular initiatives targeting SMEs. These initiatives will be implemented and tested for feedback & adaptation in order to constitute replicable tools across EU as well as monitored against their expected impact. The partnership of the project includes regional authorities, local governance and business representatives, coming from 5 countries: Greece, Italy, Finland, United Kingdom and Bulgaria.

The **BIOREGIO** project boosts bio-based circular economy through transfer of expertise dealing with the best available technologies and cooperation models. The project aims to boost economic development and create job opportunities in Central Macedonia. It contributes to achieving the Europe 2020 targets for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, also in line with the smart specialization strategy. It should create jobs and help SMEs to become more competitive and innovation-driven. EU funding will also contribute to meeting the requirements of the Union’s acquis, in particular as regards greenhouse gas reduction and increase energy efficiency. The partnership of the project includes a total of eight (8) partners from six European Regions: Finland, Spain, Slovakia, Greece, Romania and France.

• RCM joined the Balkan Med program with the **AGROLABS** project that links directly to the **VIII SBA Principle**. Especially it aims to develop RDTI networks in the agro-food sector in order to promote the sectorial competitiveness in line with the promotion of sustainable growth and also to encourage the development of new employment opportunities. The project will create opportunities to stimulate producers, SMEs, research centers and public administrations to work together transnationally. Synergies from the project will be displayed in Greece, Cyprus, Albania and Bulgaria.

**The Collaborations and Links in the entrepreneurship ecosystem**

The SMEs in RCM need support in order to increase funding sources and investments, embody RTDI activities to upsurge competitiveness, and access global markets. Moreover they need to develop new forms of cooperation and networking at national and international level in order to build and exploit economies of scale. The close cooperation of the RCM with the Chambers of Commerce, the Development Agencies and Associations of the region, makes it possible to evaluate and identify specific actions to be implemented and achieve these objectives. Furthermore, RCM proposes to comprise the following entities related to research, innovation and entrepreneurship in its networking strategy: CERN, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Alexandria Innovation Zone, Exporters’ Association of Northern Greece (SEVE), Industries Northern Greece (FING), Centre for Research and Technology Hellas (CERTH) and Thessaloniki Technology Park.
The organizational structure in the RCM that supports the entrepreneurship ecosystem

The new Independent Division for Innovation and Entrepreneurship Support (related to the III SBA principle) was established in early 2017 with a mission to fully support entrepreneurship and strengthening and promoting specific innovation activities for all SMEs in the region through the creation of a mechanism that will play the role of a single interface module (called one stop shop), between SME’s, their regulatory needs and hinders, their better linking with mainly RTDI actors and also supporting them in their struggle to find ways to fund their business activities.

Under the Independent Division operates the Entrepreneurship Support and Incentives (incentives of regional and national development law) Department, which is responsible in particular for administrative and technical support of entrepreneurs, and particularly for the implementation of the legal framework to provide incentives to private companies in their investment priorities. Among its responsibilities we can find a repository with a number of studies (sectoral and other) that can used by the SMEs.

The establishment of the digital signature is an action to facilitate entrepreneurship and it should be also noted, as it is a reliable tool that can save important resources for administrative e-government procedures accomplishment and provide a convenient, fast and safe way to manage the business transactions with the public authority (RCM) e.g. the submission of proposals for financing or licensing.

B. The EER Strategy 2022: Think Smart – Act Fast

The EER Strategy for the Region of Central Macedonia extends from 2017 to 2022 and focuses on SMEs to: ease regulatory burden, embody innovation, and boost sustainable competitiveness to access global markets and become export oriented. Its moto is Think Smart – Act Fast.

The main underlying driving force for accomplishing our vision is the Regional Innovation Strategy, a place-based strategy that gives the opportunity to prioritize in an era of low public and private budgeting but with the support of the ecosystem and stakeholders, since this strategy has been co-designed, co-developed and will be co-executed, thus increasing the possibility of its success in the long run. Figure 2 shows its main components linking to actions:

Analytically the Strategy’s components are:

1. Create an ecosystem approach model for the regional development: All shareholders co-design the main regional strategy to be able to bring off better results for all. Every stakeholder has its own

![Figure 2: The EER Strategy’s components](image)
unique strategy to plan and implement but through this component everybody is contributing to the Regional one to accomplish better ROI of the total public funding in the long run.

2. Emphasis will be given to the huge quantity of RDTI regional reserves that will be used to increase the technological status of a strong extrovert industry sector. The specialization areas are: Agrofood, Tourism, Materials (Building) and Textile (mainly resources management), that are all tradeable sectors. The important and new aspect here is the strategy will be focusing on innovations that are fertilizing in the areas where specialization value chains are crossing each other ie. Agrofood meets Tourism and Culture. **The ultimate strategic goal is to increase the average technological and non-technical Innovation level of all SMEs.**

3. **Increase the leverage of the regional funds** by creating a funding platform where all stakeholders that manage any type of fund will become together to coordinate their actions and plan / implement new financial tools. (Regional Operational program managing authority, other managing authorities either local, regional or state i.e. Rural program, Banks, Private entities like Venture capitals, Business Angel networks etc)

4. **Inspiring and supporting entrepreneurship in all its forms**: from idea creation and startups to development and fast uptake in global markets.

RCM has decided to **focus on the following SBA Principle** pillars. This decision is based on of the SWOT analysis, Vision, Strategy and on the consultation between the regional stakeholders:

**Principle I:** Create an environment in which entrepreneurs and family businesses can thrive and Entrepreneurship is rewarded  
**Principle IV:** Make public administrations responsive to SMEs’ needs  
**Principle V:** Adapt public policy tools to SME needs: facilitate SMEs’ participation in public procurement and better use State Aid possibilities for SMEs  
**Principle VI:** Facilitate SMEs’ access to finance and develop a legal and business environment supportive to timely payments in commercial transactions  
**Principle VIII:** Promote the upgrading of skills in SMEs and all forms of innovation.

**Linking Strategic Actions and SBA Principles**

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Figure 3: The RCMs’ EER Strategy
## Analysis of the Actions

### 1st ACTION: Creation of a Standardization Team

**SCOPE:** Reducing bureaucracy of the regional administrative services to SMEs  
**Refers to the IV SBA Principle**

Bureaucracy is perhaps one of the major problems for the average regional & Greek SME. In the administrative structure of the Region of Central Macedonia we can identify 12 different departments that entrepreneurs must contact in order to issue necessary documents such as permits and certificates. Each department issues an average of more than ten documents for the concerned entrepreneur. Although the new national legislation (L.4412/2016) is trying to simplify procedures, regionally concerted actions will further stimulate growth and provide competitive advantage in the RCM.

The Region of Central Macedonia decided to set up a “Standardization Team” with a main goal to map every single procedure, analyze it and finally make specific suggestions on how to simplify it, decrease the burden for SMEs/applicants, and finally develop a roadmap towards digitization that will eventually lead to fully adapt e-government principles. The team comprises with employees, executives, managers from every department such the Internal Auditing, Division of Innovation & Entrepreneurship etc and will be working intensely towards their goal to a detailed analysis and documentation of all processes. The “Standardization Team” will identify procedures and documents of all processes that have been recorded, and will check if they meet the criteria: friendliness, necessity, effectiveness, efficiency, practicability and transparency. The steps are:

1. Meeting with all departments directors involved in issuing documents  
2. Collect all necessary information: Type of documentation, average completion time, information required, responsibilities, employees involved, information sources  
3. Categorization of the documents  
4. Standardization of the documents and Modeling of them.

| Goal: Reducing bureaucracy and red tape business activities  
Indicators:  
1. Reduction of the Number of standard forms by 40%  
2. Reduction of the issuing time by 50%  
Timeline: Gradually implemented and achieve the goals until 2022. |

### 2nd ACTION: Function as a Living Lab

**SCOPE: Function of the Region of Central Macedonia as a Living Laboratory**  
**Refers to the V SBA Principle**

The need to innovate is increasingly important for all types and sizes of SMEs, but the opportunities for innovation differ substantially between them. For micro-, small-, and medium-sized enterprises, innovation activities are both crucial and demanding because of limited resources. These organizations are often focusing on their everyday operations, failing to recognize opportunities to innovate, a strategic decision with positive long term competitive advantages. One of the main barriers in introducing and testing innovative products and services into the market is finding initial buyers (early adopters) for their prototypes in order to value their business model, something very crucial especially for small SMEs. Thus, a living lab is an environment that has a defined approach to support these kind of actions. Typically, this approach is based on five key principles, which guide the operations of the living lab: value, sustainability, influence, realism, and openness.

To support Micro-enterprises, RCM will offer start-ups and research entities the real-world contexts as an implementation laboratory, to test their innovations at an initial stage sharing the experience and offering feedback. The Region of Central Macedonia has experimented in the past with this idea, and now the authority has decided to develop a specific detailed plan, interlinked it with the V (fifth) SBA principle in order to create Value for Micro-enterprises through Collaboration and Innovation.
The action will be a powerful instrument to:
• Speed up the innovation process from idea to market launch
• Identify problems and lead to product improvement
• Present and promote the innovative products.

**Goal:** Giving the opportunity to entrepreneurs to test their innovative products and supporting users involvement and innovation processes carried out in real-world contexts.

**Indicators and timeline:**
1. Innovative products & services using the Lab: 2017: Initializing the process – 2018 and on: The number of products & services requests on using the Lab will start to increase. Depending on the criteria around 50% of the applications will be accepted and implemented in the Living Lab
2. Scale up the process to all regional offices in six major cities of the region. 2018: Process initiation and starting up. 2019 and on these offices follows the same targets as the main office in Thessaloniki.

**3rd ACTION:** Creation of a strategic funding platform under the aegis of RCM

**SCOPE:** Increase funding / creating collaboration culture

*Refers to the VIII SBA Principle*

In a seemingly nonstop recession wave in RCM (as well as the whole country), small businesses are struggling more than ever to stay afloat, and entrepreneurs are not facing great odds. Finance their investments is difficult but finance their everyday activities and working capital is even harder since the funding sources are limited, mainly due to capital controls. Globally, we have been witnessing the rise of a number of funding tools and the fall of interest rates, two driving forces that could be used to finance business activities in the area. The RCMs’ Strategy for SMEs includes a plan to create a platform with the participation of all regional and national funding institutions (and not only), in order to increase funding for SMEs, create a collaboration culture with the private sector, leveraging private funding, with strategic objectives: (a) funding actions and projects quite smoothly and (b) linking financial tools and instruments by setting up a coordinating body at regional level. Today the Regional authority has been able to use public funding through its ROP (under Axes 01,02 and 03) to fund SMEs and at the same time draw a number of supporting initiatives to boost funding like Incubators, Accelerators and even a regional fund. Also the region authority will be supporting stakeholders’ activities in increasing private funding such as KEPA’s initiative of Micro Funding and Hellenic Business Angel Network’ efforts to advocate Business Angels.

**Goal:** The creation of one funding platform

**Indicators and timeline:** 2017: Planning and initializing the process – 2018 and on: Full membership of the platform: Total 10 stakeholders, until 2019.

**4th ACTION:** Regional Cooperation to co-create and co-lead a S3 sub-platform

**SCOPE:** Developing a new interregional context to support innovative pilot projects in its path to the global Agri-Food market.

*Refers to the VIII SBA Principle*

EU regions are invited to propose a thematic area in an open call by EU in relation to S3 Platform, that is of their interest and it is linked to agri-food and their smart specialization strategies (RIS3). The main goal is to collaborate with other regions in perspective of starting a partnership for co-investments in developing new products, and services that will be competing in the Global Value Chains. RCM in collaboration with North Brabant (a Dutch region) has proposed the thematic area “Rural diversification and Smart Agri-Food destinations” linked to agri-food and their smart specialization strategies (RIS3). The proposal is about creating a European partnership following the recent suggestions of the EU policy brief on “Food and Gastronomy as elements of regional innovation strategies” where it is recommended that it is crucial to explore niches in the agro-food sector that have the potential to generate *new innovative*
products and services that could be leaders in Global Value Chains. These niches can emerge from the cross-fertilization of traditional agro-food sectors and technologies and science such as Food technologies, ICT, etc. The platform will also represent a way to help local communities both to create digital coordination and new links, between all stakeholders, rural and urban areas and help them to challenge the market and improve their social, cultural and economic activities, overtaking structural and physical limits and providing opportunities for rural diversification.

Inter European collaboration can help to:

- Develop a portfolio of innovative pilots, in early TRL (technology readiness level);
- Construct a road map that will bring these pilots closer to the market in coordination with SMEs and funding sources;
- Share mutual information and Experiment with policy learning and transfer of good practice;
- Align policies in specific areas and joint actions and form strategic alliances for a continuous pipeline of joint actions and projects;

**Goal:** The creation of a new platform that will be the fertilizer and the nurturing environment to develop, innovative products, services and business models allowing participating regions to support Afro-Food technologies and investments, and rural producers to expand their activities into new areas, involving local communities to manage vibrant and attractive places to live and work. The platform will be initializing even if the proposal will not be approved, with region’s own capital and resources.

**Indicators and timeline:**

2017 status: Pending approval of the proposal
2018: Organize three (3) workshops under a Multi-Helix approach
2019: One (1) sub-platform, at least 10 collaborating regions with respective pilot project proposal
2020: Organize a conference/matching event to disseminate the main results.

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**5th ACTION:** Participation of innovative SMEs in exhibitions with the assistance and support of RCM

**SCOPE:** Region of Central Macedonia as a booster to the extroversion of SMEs

**Refers to the VIII SBA Principle**

Supporting any kind and especially innovative enterprises in accessing global markets, will strengthen their long term sustainable competitive advantage, resilience capacity and will of course improve regional development and economic indicators. Participation in well-organized exhibitions, business trips & roadshows to target markets and business to business meetings strengthen SMEs ability to enter, expand and successfully operate in European and global markets, by forming new partnerships, setting international presence, and developing strategic partnerships both at home and abroad. Participation in exhibitions is one of the factors promoting extroversion but also a hindrance to small entrepreneurs due to lack of financial resources.

RCM has been implementing for some years actions in supporting SMEs in their effort to export, but now will heavily increase its budget and will also emphasize on innovative companies, when offering space in its kiosks/stands. RCM is planning to participate in a number of exhibitions targeting sectors such as food and tourism but also exhibitions in areas like ICT.

It is important for the Region of Central Macedonia to ensure that many SMEs in the area have the opportunity to participate in exhibitions, roadshows, business trips and other events either through their business unions or as individual companies. It is also very important though that startups and innovative companies have the chance to use such services as well. These services include consulting on how to better plan participation in a fair/exhibition, promote products and services in a common participatory booth, and other sharing services.

**Goal:** Giving the opportunity to entrepreneurs to promote their products.

**Indicators and timeline:**

Number of exhibitions to participate: Status 2017: 14 exhibitions, 2018 onward ≥ 14 exhibitions per year
6th ACTION: Cooperation for Innovation  
SCOPE: Region of Central Macedonia in cooperation with CERN  
Refers to the I, V, VIII SBA Principles  

In January 2017, by co-signing an MOU, a cooperation between the Region of Central Macedonia and one of the major Research Institutions worldwide, CERN has started. RCM is one of the four self-governing bodies worldwide, which have signed a cooperation agreement with CERN. It is no coincidence that already a number of countries, such as Great Britain, Norway, the Netherlands and Austria, are rushing to make a corresponding manner the achievements of CERN. The MOU opens new perspectives for the Region of Central Macedonia, strengthening entrepreneurship, innovation and new technologies, for startups companies, but also for young people (the human capital) which is the biggest competitive advantage of regions. Three main axes are included in MOU: 1. The providing expertise from CERN to entrepreneurs’ interest in innovation and new technologies in Central Macedonia (PVIII). 2. The opportunity to students from higher education institutions of Central Macedonia for participation in seminars at CERN (P1). 3. The participation of enterprises of all sectors in Central Macedonia at CERN procurement tenders (PV).

Goals: (a) Limitation of brain drain, (b) Creating motivation and opportunities for business development, (c) Avoiding to flee enterprises to other countries (d) Creating new jobs.

Indicators and timeline:  
Business Delegations to CERN: 1 per year  
Events/workshops organized in RCM with the participation of CERN: 1 per year  
Seminars for students to CERN: 1 per year  
Participated beneficiaries per event/delegation/seminar: At least 15 beneficiaries

7th ACTION: Increase Funding for start-ups  
SCOPE: Supporting new and innovative SMEs  
Refers to the VI SBA Principle  

RCM as policy maker will focus on supporting new SMEs and innovative start-ups and prioritize actions based on the following evaluation criteria:

- Effectiveness of SMEs and Start Ups in contributing in the strategic actions of the wider operational planning and serving the regional development priorities and
- Feasibility in terms of investment maturity of the actions that will be funded, according to the provisions of the regulatory framework and the commitment of the necessary resources (i.e. private capital leveraging).

This action is to support mainly new startup enterprises through business consulting and knowledge & innovation support services enhancing startups located within the administrative boundaries of the Region of Central Macedonia. These start-ups will either enter new markets or develop existing ones in their effort to promote their products and services.

The specific objectives of the action are the following:

- Technology transfer from RTDI stakeholders to SMEs to develop new products and services;
- Developing innovative internal manufacturing and operational procedures.
- Enhancing business cooperation with research and technology organizations;
- Promote R&D activities targeting SMEs’ needs;

Goals: Increasing funding for SMEs and start-ups  
Indicators and timeline: Beneficiaries: 2022: At least 310 start-ups.  
Business R&D expenditure (in relation to the regional GDP). 2017 status: 0.16 - 2022: 0.25
5. Communication plan

The RCM’s Communication Plan follows a basic road map and timeline format. It employs strategies and tactics that will lay a foundation to communicate the regions’ EER vision and action plan to all stakeholders effectively and efficiently, ensuring that EER’s commitment to outreach and community involvement is consistent with its enhanced level of service, efficiency and operational effectiveness.

Presented below is the communication plan of the planned dissemination activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st Action: Creation of a Standardization Team</strong></td>
<td>Training the Directors of the involved departments</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>4th Q 2017</td>
<td>Directors &amp; Standardization Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share the logo “EER Award” to all the new documents</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate the action on the RCM’s website</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Entrepreneurs, users, business and EER community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2020-2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd Action: Function as a Living Lab</strong></td>
<td>Communicate the action on the RCM’s website</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2017-2022</td>
<td>Innovative entrepreneurs, companies and start-ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising actions: Digital Banners, publications, interviews to attract interest</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2019-2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training the Vice Governors and related departments of RCM’s Unities to transfer the action</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>Related human resources of Regional Unities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2019-2022</td>
<td>Innovative entrepreneurs, companies and start-ups, EER community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3rd Action: Creation of a strategic funding platform under the aegis of RCM</strong></td>
<td>Communicate the action on the RCM’s website</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td>Debt entities (ie Banks), Private Equity entities, Microfunding, Business Angels, Public Managing Authorities, EER Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising actions: Digital Banners, publications, interviews to attract interest</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conference to disseminate the actions’ results and the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4th Action: Regional Cooperation to co-create and</strong></td>
<td>Communicate the action on the RCM’s website</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td>RTDI actors, Business community, SMEs, Debt entities (ie Banks), Private Equity entities,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Region</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>co-lead a S3 sub-platform</strong></td>
<td>Interviews to attract interest</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2020</td>
<td>EER Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conference to disseminate the actions’ results and the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5th Action:</strong> Participation of innovative SMEs in exhibitions with the assistance and support of RCM</td>
<td>Communicate the exhibitions and the invitations to SMEs on the RCM’s website</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td>SMEs developing innovative products/services, Start-Ups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participation in the exhibitions</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2019-2022</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Short projections of quality products</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2017-2022</td>
<td>Consumers, customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tributes and other advertising actions (flyers, video spots, documentaries, souvenirs, branding etc)</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2017-2022</td>
<td>Consumers, customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2020-2022</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship ecosystem, EER community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6th Action:</strong> Cooperation with CERN for Innovation</td>
<td>Providing and communicate the CERNs’ procurement tenders</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2017-2022</td>
<td>SMEs developing innovative products/services, Start-Ups, education institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advertising actions: Digital Banners, interviews and articles to communicate CERNs achievements to attract interest</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate all the actions and their results related to the MOU (seminars, the new technologies presentations from CERN, the reaching participation at CERN procurement tenders etc)</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship ecosystem, EER community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7th Action:</strong> Supporting start-ups and innovative SMEs</td>
<td>Tributes and other advertising actions (flyers, events, publication, etc)</td>
<td>Regional level</td>
<td>2018-2022</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship ecosystem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate the achieving indicators</td>
<td>Regional &amp; EU level</td>
<td>2020-2022</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship ecosystem, EER community</td>
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