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D2.1 Benchmarking and SWOT analysis to other FP6 SSA projects

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The strategic objective of the Star-Net transport is to increase the participation of surface transport-related SMEs in the surface transport programme. Within this framework an Information programme for the network members will be implemented through an online eLearning platform with the overall aim to implement a full range of services for the, training, information sharing and deployment of the network services.

The objective of this deliverable was to benchmark and conduct SWOT analysis to better understand how FP6 transport related SSA projects influenced and supported transport SMEs in increasing their participation in the Framework Programmes. Analyses were conducted on the following projects (alphabetical order):

- AUTO-IN FP7
- EURO-TRANS
- HUNPOL Trans
- TranSMEs
- SURFACE NET

Each of the projects had its distinctive goals and methodologies, which are described in this report.

In the conclusions and recommendations part of the report, a short summary of the tools used in all projects was prepared, along with the brief description of the “success rate”

2 FP6 TRANSPORT SSA PROJECTS OVERVIEW

AUTO-IN FP7 - *Boost AUTomotive SMEs participation IN FP7*

The overall aim of this project was **to promote the participation of SMEs from the automotive sector in the 7th Framework programme (FP7)** and in other EU available mechanisms for promoting innovation.

This initiative **aims to increment the Research and Innovation potential in automotive SMEs, mainly from the New Member States and Candidate Countries** by providing to no-profit organizations from those countries, instruments to assist the SMEs to take advantage of the European Research opportunities to carry on their Research and Innovation projects.

The activities foreseen in this initiative has resulted in fruitful co-operation in RTD between New, Old and Future member States and stimulated generation of innovative projects in the field of Surface Transport

EURO-TRANS - *Promoting and facilitating the participation of SMEs in FP 7 EU-RTD projects in Surface Transport – automotive, railways, waterborne.*

The goal of EURO-TRANS_Days was to encourage, facilitate and enhance cooperation between SMEs of Surface Transport (road, rail, waterborne and intermodality), and major European RD players and industrial stakeholders of the European Research Area.

EURO-TRANS_Days was a follow-up of EURO-TRANS project and aimed at:

- increasing the integration of SMEs in European R&D projects of the 7th Framework Programme, especially in the frame of the second call of proposals of FP7 – Transport,
- initiating new European partnerships (FP7, Eureka/Era-net, bi- or tri-national projects),
- increasing technology transfer and synergies between SMEs (cooperation agreements such as sharing and combining knowledge and know-how),
- increasing links with the Transport Technology Platforms ERRAC, ERTRAC, WATERBORNE.

These objectives were achieved through the realization of:

- TWO INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOPS in WARSAW (PL), October 2007 and MADRID (ES), March 2008. Each of them included

presentations of Technology Platforms ERRAC, ERTRAC, WATERBORNE (strategic research agenda, themes of future FP7 projects), sessions (thematic/sectorial workshops; horizontal workshops on consortium agreement, IPR), one to one confidential meetings, coaching appointments. 200-300 participants per event were expected from all 25 EU members, candidates countries, associate countries and third countries,

- coaching services for SMEs to assist them in finding partners, identifying opportunities to participate in new projects, initiating projects from their own ideas, identification of SME's expertise, preparation of proposal. These services were carried out before, during and after the events.

HUNPOL Trans - *Encouraging and Facilitating the Participation of HUNgarian and POLish Surface TRANSport Research Organisations To FP6*

The HUNPOL-TRANS project aims to contribute actively to the implementation of activities of the Surface Transport work programme (FP6 and FP7).

General objectives:

- to contribute to the development of ERA in surface transport
- to increase participation of surface transport research organisations from Hungary and Poland
- to renew the enthusiasm in Europe for science and technology regarding surface transport
- to catalyse researchers
- to boost Europe's competitiveness with sustainable growth
- to strengthen and expand cooperation among the member countries and the ACC
- to facilitate cooperation with countries outside EU
- to support Joint European Technology Initiatives

Specific objectives:

- to assess situation and perspectives in Hungary and Poland with respect to surface transport (road, rail and waterborne)
- to select most active RTD units (including centres of excellence) from the surface transport sector in Hungary and Poland and other EU countries
- to define their profiles – strengths, weaknesses and needs
- to organise a series of profiled workshops adapted to real needs of participants
- to identify IPs and NoEs that fit with the needs and plans
- to encourage participants to become surface transport evaluators or experts monitoring project progress and to make it possible for the

representatives of the European Commission to meet the potential evaluators and experts

- to promote constructive international networking and partnership in the areas of surface transport
- to facilitate access of Hungary and Polish organizations to European Technology Platforms

TranSMEs - *Bringing ACC and NMS SMEs operating in the transport and environment sector closer to the European Research Area by publishing an open call for submitting draft project proposals.*

The objective of TRANSMES project was **to increase the participation of SMEs from transport and environment sector, from NMS and ACC in FP6 projects, especially Integrated Projects and Network of Excellence and STREP and in new FP7 projects.** The TRANSMES project concentrated on the involvement and enhancing the readiness of SMEs from transport and environment sector to participate in new, existing, and future European RTD activities and programmes.

TranSMEs project Partners, **offered help in proposal writing** to those institutions which after taking advantage of the Information day, workshops were decided to participate in the Seventh Framework Programme. After publishing open call for submitting draft project proposals, Project Partners assisted winners to create consortium and to fill in Part A and B of the proposal. Project Partners helped other participants to find partners or running projects to join in.

TARGET GROUPS: RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS AND ENTERPRISES, MAINLY SMALL AND MEDIUM SIZED

Researchers and entrepreneurs from New Member States and accession countries dealing with transport and environment sector had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the European Commission actions in this field as well as to establish new cooperation contacts with foreign research institutions and firms with a view to successfully apply for the European funds for research and technological development.

PARTNER DATABASE

TranSMEs maintains database of collaboration offers of research and industrial institutions. The database is to help searching partners for European projects and other joint initiatives.

SURFACE NET - *Supporting surface transport SMEs in Candidate Countries preparing RTD projects for FP7*

The Surface-Net project was a supporting action addressing the SMEs from the Surface Transport on the Candidate Countries - Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey.

(Meanwhile, during project execution, Romania e Bulgaria became full members of the EU). Prepare these SMEs to suit the needs of EC RTD actions in the field, in coherence with the specific calls of FP7, focusing on the strengthening of the research capabilities of the addressed SMEs in order to enable them to join large research efforts in the sector in cooperation with major industrial players by pursuing the following methodology:

- To analyse the existing RTD capabilities of Surface Transport SMEs in Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey;
- To extract on a functional basis their key competence in areas relevant to the transport activity using a novel and simplified methodology Technology Assessment tool;
- Disseminate the research results and support actions of FP6 Surface Transport projects;
- Identify ideas and provide support to Surface Transport SMEs integration on research consortiums in the FP7 theme 7 “Transport”, sub-theme Surface Transport, using a simplified methodology based on an online PC based tool;
- Facilitate involvement of SMEs from Candidate Countries in a local event organized in each Candidate Country, which will attend seminars in “How to perform an internal Technology Assessment?”, “How to write a competitive proposal?” and “FP7 stepping into EU funding for innovation and competitiveness in Surface Transport”;
- Promote involvement of SMEs in the 57th “World Congress & Exhibition and City Transport Exhibition”, that will occur in Helsinki, Finland on 20-24 May 2007.

3 PROJECT METHODOLOGIES OF WORK AND RESULTS

Taking into account various approaches taken by each of the SSA projects, two kinds of methodologies were distinguished:

- technical and,
- awareness raising and dissemination

The technical part of each of the projects was to apply special instruments in order to identify specific R&D&I capabilities of target groups and to select the ones that would be most appropriate to be supported in terms of FP's projects and initiatives. Such activities were very narrow in terms of overall number of end-users selected for the support

On the other hand, the awareness and dissemination activities goal was to reach as wide auditorium as possible, providing valuable information on current EC activities in transport sector as well as organizing targeted events aiming at enlarging the cooperation between specific groups of interest.

In following subchapters, a short overview of both types of activities is presented.

3.1 TECHNICAL METHODOLOGIES

- Assessment of innovation and R&D needs and ideas for specific groups of interest (SMEs and others) – i.e. by conduction various forms of technological audits
- Organization of groups of interests (clusters), gathering companies operating in the same fields of expertise, thus enabling stronger cooperation and development of mutual fields of interest
- Creating profiled databases, consisting of profiles of companies (also R&D institutes, universities and others), fields of expertise, innovation offers and proposal ideas. Information about such databases were disseminated via various channels in order to initiate consortia submitting project proposals for different FP6 and FP7 calls
- Specific and targeted support delivered to each of the projects clients. I.e. support in proposal idea identification, preparation and submission, including verification of conformity of proposed ideas against the give FP Work Programmes.
- Some of the SSA project created various reports, manuals and methodologies with the aim of extending the project support and disposal of the knowledge gained in the realization of the project, after their end
- Also, projects offered direct consultation and coaching for parties submitting their project ideas and proposals.

3.2 AWARENESS RAISING AND DISSEMINATION METHODOLOGIES

Awareness and dissemination campaigns are always an important part of the project. In each case it was necessary to try to reach to as many future clients as possible. Comparing all SSA project there were many similarities, but some projects had this task put to the higher priority than others (i.e. EURO-TRANS Days, as a project that's goal was to organize two international, transport – targeted events).

Work plan of each SSA, in terms of awareness and dissemination, consisted of:

National info-days and conferences aiming at:

- building the R&D&I capacity and potential
- providing practical information on FP6 and FP7 participation rules, proposal preparation
- coaching services for partner search and proposal elaboration
- identification of opportunities and matchmaking of consortia
- development of submitted project ideas
- identification of companies competencies and expertise

Websites – each project had its own website (in English and other partners languages), consisting of up-to-date information both on project activities as well as various EU initiatives lying in scope of the project support

Promotion materials and activities – such as flyers, publications in specialized press, project presentation on national and international events, business meetings (ETP's and others), dissemination of project offer to email databases, and others.

Contact with national and European bodies – common action for all SSA's was to send (and repeat in the later stage of the projects) continuous information package to all Transport and related National Contact Points. Cooperation was also established with European Technology Platforms, national and European Transport oriented chambers, associations and institutes.

Besides of above actions, common activities were – personal one-to-one meetings with possible clients, representatives of national and European authorities and others.

4 KEY RESULTS

In a transversal view of the projects the following major key results could be identified:

- Identification of transport and transport-related companies across Europe, being interested in taking part in R&D&I initiatives at European level (over 1000 of such companies were identified)
- Support in creation of common interest groups (clusters), gathering companies from the same transport sectors, allowing more focused “brainstorming” of possible project ideas
- Support in identification and submission of project proposals for FP6 and FP7 Calls. (over 80 project ideas were identified, with about 30 submitted to different FP6 and FP7 schemes).
- Matchmaking and brokerage activities conducted during a number of international events organized by SSA projects
- Creation of a number of reports, guidelines and manuals aiming at supporting SMEs in successful participation in FP projects, reaching beyond the SSA duration timeline
- Assessment studies of situation and perspectives in transport sector in all countries targeted by SSA’s
- Cooperation with key European players, allowing to support the SMEs in joining valuable proposals
- Organization of a large number of national and international events, allowing SMEs to acquaint themselves with FP’s specifics, meet and discuss with key players and learn from their experiences, find new business and R&D&I contacts, join and form project consortia, and others.

5 OBSTACLES AND PREVENTION MEASURES

During the realization of each of the SSA projects, there were some obstacles that were identified and successfully solved. Some of them concerned the formal realisation of proposals (need to amend the duration etc.) and will not be further described in this report.

Several obstacles are presented below, along with the prevention measures that were applied in order to overcome them.

Language barriers

It was a very common situation engaged by the SSA’s. Many of SMEs identified had difficulties in terms of English language. Company managers that have a

good knowledge of their business, in many cases had little or no knowledge of the English language making harder to discuss their problems and to expose the contents of the workshops. Besides this all support tools proposed by projects were also in English making the use of these tools more difficult for them. To overcome those barriers was to apply those tools in local languages, thus suggesting that in case of further engagement in European initiatives it is most important, that necessary actions has to be performed in order to overcome those barriers.

Differences in international cooperation approach

Some of the SSA's started its work in the beginning of FP6 and were targeted to ACC countries (some of those countries are now MS). Companies from those countries represented different point of approach to international cooperation. Some countries already had many years of experience in such cooperation and were integrating with rest out Europe quickly. On the other hand, there were countries that far behind to the remaining.

Despite of those barriers, various actions undertaken by SSA projects allowed to show them opportunities to increase their rate of participation in FP's. Good tool for such support was organization of national-level meetings and workshops that attracted SMEs and allowed to confront and resolve and doubts and questions that refrained them from involving them in FP activities. Good practice was to invite for presentation and discussion representatives of SMEs already participating in projects, so the inexperienced companies could learn from the practical point of view, what are the direct and indirect benefits.

Lack of RTD capabilities and needs of transport SMEs

In many cases of direct contact with companies, SMEs replied that they are not interested nor they do not conduct and R&D works. For such cases, special approach was done, explaining that also manufacturing companies are welcome for cooperation, as in many projects the end-users or test-user are very important and needed.

Many companies understood that even if they are not organizations with state-of-art RTD they can participate in common projects with more experienced EU partners.

6 STAR-NET TRANSPORT APPROACH

The intensive actions by national organizations, national programmes, and industry associations promoting R&D, does not necessarily lead to the perception of EU research as business or technology opportunities for SMEs. The arguments of international relationships and new customers approach or finance of new technologies are sometimes hard but very often possible to introduce. Best way to achieve this is by one-to-one meetings. Such tool has proven to be most effective. Personal assistance performed to the SME is most valuable

SMEs may enter first time on FP projects by the hand of one customer or one university or research centre. The promotion of research to SME could be more effective by addressing the big companies, universities and research centres to promote the coaching of their suppliers.

Many SMEs have difficulties with the identification and proper description of their needs and ideas. Therefore in such case, those companies need to be approached with experienced support, allowing to identify and correctly describe their idea / need as in many cases, companies bring ideas which they think are innovative, but after careful analysis they reveal to be acquisition of commercial equipment or development of a solution that already exists in the market.

IPR always raise a lot of doubts and questions, as companies often are concerned that their idea might be lost or stolen during and after realization of the project. In that case, it is necessary to explain, that after the project is accepted by EC, a proper agreement can be made to protect the ideas and solutions the company brings to the project.

A common problem that was also identified is the lack of experience with international cooperation, leading to unwillingness in taking part in such activities. In that case, companies should be clearly informed that they will receive proper and extensive support upon request, at any stage of the proposal preparation, execution and finalisation.

Many SMEs state that the time interval between the formulation of project idea into project proposal and getting solid results is very long and does not correspond with the short term priorities of SMEs that many of them are depending on. In this case it is important to emphasise all advantages that come out of carrying out more ambitious projects in an international level and getting to cooperate with actors from different countries.

From the financial point of view, SMEs are aware that the European Commission does not fully finance projects; therefore especially the smallest companies could have problems with their own financial contribution.

Answer to this argument is twofold. On one side, it is worth explaining that the results of the project will compensate company's initial contribution. On the other hand, it is worth to know if there is any financial support instrument at national level, from which SMEs could receive additional funding to cover their own contribution. In many countries such tool are available and being distributed by government bodies, both for the support of participation in proposals as well as for the preparation of coordination proposals.

From the awareness point of view, a radical change was observed during FP6, within the knowledge that SMEs have about Framework Programme. Companies do know more in terms of general information and awareness. Nevertheless specific dissemination activities should be introduced, but their form should concentrate on practical issues (proposal preparation, financing, partner search and others). Events with a small number of attendants have better impact, as they allow more active participation leading to better communication flow to SMEs.