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IRS launches European Training Network to tackle social and economic problems of rural regions

The Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS) in Erkner near Berlin has successfully applied for a research and training network in the highly competitive „Marie-Sklodowska-Curie“ programme of the European Union. Twelve research institutes and social enterprises from seven European countries, coordinated by the IRS, will offer a structured doctoral training on social entrepreneurship in structurally weak rural regions. The doctoral candidates will conduct research guided by the question of which innovative solutions the social entrepreneurs can offer to tackle the economic and social downward spirals in these regions. The project will run for four years and has a budget of 2.5 million Euros.

Structurally weak rural regions are faced with major social and economic problems. In comparison to urban or intermediate regions, predominantly rural regions are economically less productive and they provide a less extensive scope of desired goods and services. As a consequence, the regions experience a loss of inhabitants, especially of young and highly skilled people. Thus, downward spirals are set in motion that further reduce economic opportunities and prevent rural regions from overcoming their structural deficits.

The RURATION (“Social Entrepreneurship in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: Analysing Innovative Troubleshooters in Action”) research and training network focuses on socially innovative solutions to these rural problems developed by social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurs are understood as practitioners who create and implement social innovations by entrepreneurial means. The question arises under which conditions they operate, how they organise solutions, how they network and empower residents, which impacts they actually have on rural development, and how they can be supported in their problem-solving activities.

The European Commission identifies the subject of social innovation in rural regions as a research gap. RURATION will fill this gap. The research and training network brings together highly acknowledged academics and very experienced practitioners from social enterprises to contribute their expertise in this field (e.g. with spring schools, autumn skills seminars and cross-sectoral secondments). It strives to achieve excellent research results and aims at qualifying early stage researcher as equally scientifically and practically skilled experts for social entrepreneurship and social innovations in rural regions – be it in order to conduct further research in this complex scientific field, to professionally support and promote initiatives of existing social entrepreneurial organisations, and/or to professionally start their own initiatives and social enterprises.

The project will start in December 2016. The RURATION project team consists of the following academic and non-academic partners:

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More infos:

- [RURATION project website \(upcoming\)](#)
- [RurInno project website](#)
- [Project "Innovations in Rural Municipalities. Conditions, Actors and Processes of Creative Community Development" at the IRS Website](#)

Project Consortium (Beneficiaries)

- ❖ Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space (IRS) e.V. (Germany)
- ❖ Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland)
- ❖ Roskilde University (Denmark)
- ❖ Ballyhoura Development Ltd (Ireland)
- ❖ University College Cork - National University Of Ireland, Cork (Ireland)
- ❖ Leibniz-Institut für Länderkunde e. V. (IfL) (Germany)
- ❖ University of the Aegean (Greece)
- ❖ Otelo Egen (Austria)
- ❖ University Institute of Lisbon (Portugal)

Project Partners

- ❖ Social Impact gGmbH (Germany)
- ❖ ADCMoura - Associação para o Desenvolvimento do Concelho de Moura (Portugal)
- ❖ Stevia Hellas (Greece)

With a second EU research project already running, the IRS is highly familiar with the research topic of social innovations in structurally weak rural regions: The project “Social Innovations in Structurally Weak Rural Regions: How Social Entrepreneurs Foster Innovative Solutions to Social Problems (RurInno)” started in February 2016 and provides a complementary perspective on these issues by bringing together researchers and practitioners from two research institutions and four social enterprises working in rural areas, who are pursuing three objectives together: first, promoting knowledge transfer between research and practice; second, improving empirical knowledge of conditions for social innovations in rural areas; and third, increasing the visibility of the work of social enterprises in politics and society.