

The « INNO-WISEs » project starts to make social enterprises more competitive

The project, financed by the Central Europe Interregional program, aims at proposing ideas, models and services that can make social enterprises more innovative and competitive by reducing the existing technological and business gap and stimulating a switch in mentality.

Milan, August 28, 2017 - In Italy there are about 100,000 social enterprises which are involving more than 850,000 workers and 1.7 million volunteers. An ever-growing number since 2001 with an annual average growth of 20%. However, this increase does not correspond to an adjustment from the managerial and technological point of view.

INNO-WISEs is willing to close this gap by providing social enterprises with innovative and entrepreneurial tools to make them more competitive on the market. The project, funded by the **Central Europe 2014-2020 Interregional Program**, is coordinated by the Polytechnic Foundation of Milan (Italy) and involves 12 partners from five different European countries (Italy, Belgium, Croatia, Slovenia and Poland). INNO-WISEs will operate in agriculture, sustainable tourism and waste collection and recycling.

For the first time, social enterprises will be provided with innovative tools to acquire skills that will enable them to overcome the existing technology gap. How? Through a technology transfer process that will allow the creation of an ICT platform which aim at providing adequate IT tools, as well as managerial guidelines to address the challenges of the market. It includes, among others, human resource management tools, marketing, digital platforms, e-commerce platforms. An integrated approach therefore triggers a change process not only at the technical level, but also in the mind-set and the cultural background, thus encouraging the exploitation and identification of unexploited potential in communities and territories. The project also includes a training period through the creation of tutorials, webinars and e-learning sessions.

A recent study from the European Commission ("A map of social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe") stressed that learning and using appropriate technology tools would boost the social enterprises and make them more competitive in addressing future challenges of the market. The study highlights the lack of managerial business and skills and the need to be provided with technological tools capable of following the various marketing phases of the products.

*"The INNO-WISEs project aims to activate a process of change in the entrepreneurial approach of social enterprises, providing them a business and sustainable development model that makes them competitive on the market - says **Eugenio Gatti, General Director of Milan Polytechnic Foundation, promoter of the project** -. For the Polytechnic Foundation, which supports business creation, the challenge is to foster social enterprises with the same innovative path undertaken by small and medium-sized Italian companies: to stimulate structural change with the opportunities offered by territorial policies and partners network, first of all the University".*

*"INNO-WISEs responds to what social enterprises have been waiting for years. Overcoming technological and entrepreneurial gaps are challenges that our world must grasp in the light of the recent reform of the third sector – tells precisely **Stefano Granata, Chairman of CGM**-. In these difficult economic times, Italian social enterprises resisted, but it is not enough. They are solid companies that must adapt more and more to today's challenges. It is important that social enterprises and their growth are increasingly recognized at the European level. The project partners have the vision and determination needed to achieve the goals that have been given."*

The INNO-WISEs project, funded by the European Regional Development Funds, began on 1 July 2017 and will run for three years. It includes 12 partners: Polytechnic Foundation of Milan, CGM Cooperative Group, Trento Autonomous Province, European Network of Social Integration Enterprises, SENT – Slovenian Association for Mental Health, School of Advanced Social Studies in Nova Gorica, Municipality of Nova Gorica, ITC - Innovation Technology Cluster Murska Sobota, ACT Group, Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar, Medjimurje County, Association for Regional Co-operation.