

Our Contribution to RIS3 in Our Region

Competence Network for Transfer-oriented Research (KAT) to Support Regional Prosperity in Saxony-Anhalt

In Saxony-Anhalt, Germany, the Competence Network for Transfer-oriented Research (KAT) has been set up as a catalyst for business-related innovations. Founded in 2006 it is the response to a political shift in higher education policy and general budget constraints in this shrinking region of former GDR. KAT is a joint initiative of four Universities of Applied Sciences of the region and has been co-funded by Saxony-Anhalt and ERDF. Thematic priorities reflect the Regional Innovation Strategy: Energy, mechanical engineering, resource efficiency, health/medicine, mobility-logistics, chemistry and life sciences alongside the cross-cutting issues ICT, key enabling technologies, media/creative industries.

Every member University of Applied Sciences (UAS) provides resources and expertise according to their respective practice-oriented research profile. In Saxony-Anhalt, Universities of Applied Sciences have been founded to express the political will to set up HEIs responding to the academic needs of surrounding areas. Originally, the academic profile of each UAS has reflected the economic backbones of the respective region. A pivotal element of UAS is their close connection with enterprises including for example a recruitment policy that requires professional experience in the respective industry. As regards learning and teaching, service learning and industrial placements of students are embedded into all curricula. By all these means UAS are regional key players of talent attraction and retention.

Compared to other German and European regions, Saxony-Anhalt (DEE0) has to cope with a number of long-term challenges which are among others (1) over-aged population, (2) outbound migration and related brain drain to other German regions, (3) low rated international competitiveness of SME and (4) a moderate rank in the EU's regional innovation scoreboard. Consequently, the action lines of the KAT have been targeted to tackle these challenges and to induce changes.

Against this socio-economic setting, each member UAS has established expert units (co-funded with ERDF), over the years. Those units provide consultancy services in order to (1) facilitate cooperation of academics with business, (2) to encourage transfer-oriented

research and (3) to empower SMEs to take up research findings. The KAT services include the support of researchers and business partners in (1) seeking financing opportunities, (2) applying for research and development funding, (3) acquiring third-party funds, (4) creating spin-off companies, (5) preparing market research activities and business planning. Moreover, collaborative facilities have been established to develop, elaborate and test new methods and products.

The activities of the KAT are complemented by the services of the EU Academic Network (ESF) focusing on providing information, consulting and project management support within the European Union's framework program for research and innovation HORIZON 2020. In general, KAT has led to an increase of the number of projects with SMEs and third party funded projects. In this context, the financial resources allocated by the member UAS, Saxony-Anhalt and ERDF have regularly tripled in favour of enterprises and their R&D activities. The most recent outcomes of the KAT are two collaborative strategic 4-years projects funded by the German Federal Government.

The already granted "HS³Go Europe" project on developing an EU Strategy UAS seeks to enhance the competitiveness and visibility of the scientific performance of the regional UAS within the European Research Area. The overall EU service competence should be strengthened, especially in respect to research proposal development and project management of EU research projects.

The recently begun TransInno_LSA project explores the structural evaluation and modernization of network-wide transfer and third-mission activities. Some of the expected outcomes are (1) the development of a set of indicators and other monitoring tools for UAS consultancy services towards SMEs, (2) adjustments of internal university infrastructures and communication to increase visibility and responsiveness to SME requests and (3) increased awareness about UAS scientific performance and scope of consultancy services.

Overarching purpose of the action areas - which are connected to the KAT at large - is to contribute to an accelerated smart catch-up growth in Saxony-Anhalt. In this context, driving employment, increasing innovation capacity, improving international competitiveness, responsiveness to emerging trends, effective use of limited resources are considered to be the main components.