



## Have a little... FATE: From army to entrepreneurship

From Army to Entrepreneurship" (F.A.T.E.) - is a project financed by the South East Europe Transnational Cooperation Programme, whose aim is to develop economic growth thanks to the conversion of military brownfields into business support centres or business incubators in regions where the promotion of entrepreneurial spirit and the creation of innovative firms represent pivotal assets for the local economy.

### Overview

The project demonstrates the varied opportunities offered within the framework of the fourth priority area "Development of transnational synergies for sustainable growth areas" under the area of intervention 4.1: "Tackling crucial problems affecting metropolitan areas and regional systems of settlements." The general objective of the project consists in developing, implementing and disseminating concrete strategies and operational plans to strengthen and diversify urban and regional economies, by converting military brownfields into productive structures. The issue of brownfields conversion has become one of the most important features in urban planning during the recent years. Rehabilitation of brownfields is often an important item on the agenda of local authorities and private investors: by recovering the sites, greenfields are preserved, sustainable urban development is supported and public owners can profit from the reuse. However, as other experts have remarked as well, "the biggest challenge in



From Army To Entrepreneurship

military base conversion and redevelopment, similar to other brownfield sites, is to guarantee competitive advantages (...) that can transform these sites into reliable and sustainable economic opportunities while looking after the interests of all the parties concerned" \*(Samer Ghaleb Bagaeen in Urban Design International (2006) 11, 117-128) In short: turning the military brownfields into real assets for the local communities. This is what the FATE project is aiming to achieve.



## State of Play

Activities, coordinated by Region Friuli Venezia Giulia as lead partner, started on April 2009 and are expected to end in September 2011. The project objectives are carried out by a transnational partnership made up by 15 partners plus 4 observers coming from 9 different countries. Currently, after the setting up of the management structures, the launching of the first information actions and the accomplishment of the due administrative steps, the project activities came in with the identification and adoption of the common work methodologies. The context analysis has been carried out, one for each region with the involvement of its own economical sector, and one at general level.

The SWOT analysis is now showing the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and threats affecting the project territories. These results, shared with the local stakeholders by means of focus group discussions, will pave the way to the setting up of strategies to foster entrepreneurship and boost investments and to the identification of operational plans and investment projects for the rehabilitation and transformation of military brownfields into business support centres or business incubators.

The inventory, mapping and assessment of the military brownfields is now in progress, with the collection of data and information for every region. This is a crucial step: in Romania, for instance, a decision of the central government is needed for each military brownfield transferred to a local public administration, while the project partners have foreseen a bottom-up approach with the dissemination of the outcomes of a monitoring work carried out among businesses and local authorities, to the decision makers at local and central level, to offer them a useful tool in this context. Activities will continue with the identification and evaluation of the best practices and case studies about the restructuring process of military brownfields and about the supporting systems and measures to promote entrepreneurship. In the meanwhile attention will be paid towards the different models to acquire military brownfields, as the legal framework is very heterogeneous in the nine countries involved and the project serves as an interesting observation platform. For example, in Italy and Hungary the property is local, and partners from these countries will transfer their expertise in managing negotiation and acquisition process from central to local authorities. At the end of this process, the production of a paper of transnational value is expected. A smooth management system and incisive dissemination actions will complement the main project activities, to assure the success of the operation.

The partnership is strong and tight, as shown by the active contribution of all partners to the activities and the participation in the coordination meetings. Some partners have previously cooperated in other transnational initiatives, and the partners' skills are complementary, while their variety, including "IPA" countries, makes the project a challenging and stimulating melting pot. All the different decision levels - regional, local and technical - are tackled, thus assuring the future sustainability of the action. As a matter of fact, the presence of the Regional institutions assures a broader and strategic impact to the action. The involvement of local Municipalities gives to the project a clear impact on the economic environment. Finally, technical partners bring the specific expertise (in development projects, urban and spatial planning, economics, SMEs' support and start up), that are crucial for the successful achievement of the targets.

## **Challenge**

Difficulties did not lack in these months, as the economic crisis has been affecting the project through its project partners. For example, we have faced the withdrawal of one Romanian municipality, due to the uncertainty of funds to be invested in the respective ex-military area (this type of investment having little chance to be implemented by the municipality in the current economic context). However, the project activities have not been disrupted, as the respective partner could be immediately replaced. In Slovenia there have been delays in transferring the property of military brownfields from the national to the local authorities because of the lack of financial resources, even if there is a large demand of new premises by the entrepreneurs. Also, in places where the change of ownership has already taken place, as it is the case in Hungary, the lack of financial resources by the local municipalities holds up the reconversion process. We can only reach the same conclusion as Paul Nathanail (University of Nottingham) who remarked that "brownfield regeneration is truly a cross-roads. Market confidence, social acceptance and environmental stewardship meet and often conflicting objectives need to be optimised for regeneration to succeed" .In this regard, we would like to take over his message and send it to the decision makers "today's expenditure must be seen as a capital investment with a clearly defined return, not as an ongoing expenditure". (Paul Nathanail, University of Nottingham, <http://www.eugris.info>)

## **Perspectives**

There are several elements supporting our conviction that the project will succeed. In the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region one municipality has already gained the funds for the restructuring of a former military brown-field and its reconversion in a Business Support Centre for shipbuilding companies: entrepreneurs are very enthusiastic about this project. Also in Greece, FATE project is creating special added value and is attracting the interest of general public, local experts, policy makers and businessmen: over 100 people have already participated in information meetings and workshops, thus demonstrating that the objectives of the project are strongly supported by the citizens and decision makers alike.