ALLIANCES

United with Campania

Italian regions are joining forces in a co-operative in a bid to beat recession and compete on the world stage.

AIMEE TURNER NAPLES

About 20 million people purchased tickets for Italy’s national lottery, the Superenalotto, in October. The game had not posted a winner since late April and in recent weeks, Italians spent €580 million ($776 million) hoping to win the jackpot.

But even the world’s most lucrative lottery cannot save a economically faltering. If Italy’s economy shrinks 0.5% in 2009, as projected, the country will find itself neck-deep in its fourth recession of the past 10 years.

Months before the recent plunge of the Milan stock market, indicating that business confidence was at a 15-year low, Campania’s aerospace community got together with its counterparts in the northern Piedmont region and its neighbouring Puglia in a bid to join forces to compete more effectively on the world market. The effort was to be focused on streamlining the supply chain of the small and medium-size businesses resident within these areas and match making those activities with the deep expertise of Italy’s research centres and universities in those regions.

In Campania alone, the region boasts polymer and composite centre IMAST at Portici, which provides the industrial meeting point for heavyweights such as Alenia Aeronautica, national research institution CIRA and the Federico II University, not to mention Italian aerospace research centre CIRA, which raises the SME effort within the Campania grouping.

While the aerospace cluster in Puglia is relatively young, the combined industrial strength of Piedmont and Campania’s presence is impressive, home to 500 businesses and 20,000 personnel, representing 36% of Italy’s aerospace sector and a hefty €1.1 billion in annual turnover.

META DISTRICT

Campania itself numbers 20 headquartered companies and 19 manufacturing facilities with roughly 8,100 employees in addition to another 100 SMEs employing a further 2,000. Together they generate combined sales of €1.3 billion, €600 million in exports. “This meta-district will attempt to emulate a US-style environment where research starts from a basis of agreed industrial objectives rather than an ivory tower vision of nice-to-haves,” says Nicola Mazzocco, Campania’s regional minister for universities and research activities.

In Campania, he believes, the vibrant SME presence should be able to pick the research ball and run far more swiftly than other Italian regions such as Lazio, where although R&D spend is much higher, the groves of academe are exactly that—groves with few industrial players to carry innovation through to market.

Andrea Carozzi, Campania regional minister of industrial production, says the meta-district is the first time three different regions...
have come together in this way in the history of Italian aerospace industry, although he adds that the joining of forces had its genesis long before the current economic crisis hit.

"Why? Simply because individual regions were no longer able to continue to implement policies of SME growth and innovation and so it was necessary to establish a system through which we can present ourselves as a fully fledged player at a decision-making level."

So what will be the added value of this network? "Synergies, essentially. It will be a way to tackle some of the current problems through analysing the synergies. For example, Fuglia is a lot younger in terms of industrial maturity, less research and development capacity. Campinia is a lot more mature and has precisely the research centres and university Fuglia needs."

At regional level, the current Framework Research Programme pays for - outside Euro-
AIR TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

Towering ambition

European Union aid is providing a much-needed impetus to air traffic infrastructure in the poorer parts of southern Italy.

AIMEE TURNER NAPLES

A local saying “Cristo si è fermato a Eboli” or “Christ stopped at Eboli” was used by writer Carlo Levi as the title of a book, referring to the tremendous poverty in the south of Italy at the start of the 20th century.

No surprise then that little over a century later Campania remains eligible for vital Objective One funding - one of three European Union programmes set up to help reduce differences in social and economic conditions within the European Union.

Of the three programmes, Objective One is the highest priority designation for aid and is targeted at areas where prosperity, measured in gross value added per head of population, is 75% or less of the European average.

Dr Pasquale Schiano of Italian aerospace research centre CIRA says that this reality has provided the germ of an innovative regional economic initiative to enhance and upgrade the infrastructure that allows vital air traffic links throughout southern Italy.

What CIRA is proposing with the small and medium-sized businesses in Campania and Puglia is to kickstart research activities with the aid of Objective One funds to establish a network of “virtual towers” to enhance air traffic management at minor airports in southern Italy with the consequent heavy costs of constructing physical structures.

Schiano says that in this way CIRA is strengthening its participation in the Single European Sky joint technology initiative aimed at overhauling Europe’s creaking patchwork of air traffic holdings while avoiding duplication, as this effort will be an attempt by Italian industry, together with research centres and academics, to pioneer something exclusively for domestic application.

“We originally started with a round table discussion with all those stakeholders in an effort to determine what CIRA and other research centres should and could focus on. Our remit was to look closely at specific issues that are not covered by other Italian players.”

VIRTUAL TOWERS

One example was the virtual tower, applying virtual reality techniques to existing air traffic infrastructure to allow minor airports in southern Italy to increase substantially their technological offering without the enormous capital outlay. As Schiano says: “We cannot provide a physical air traffic control tower for each airport, but the idea is to support these minor airports by using virtual towers using high-speed communication and virtual reality tools, etc.”

He adds: “The main objective here is to improve interregional mobility because, for example, in Italy we have several major airports – but if you want to travel from Naples to the south in Apulia or Calabria we really need to be talking about improvements in general aviation infrastructure.”

Thanks largely to Campania’s leadership position in general aviation manufacturing terms, the virtual tower initiative will partner other funding efforts focused on improving the 10- to 20-seat aircraft and small helicopter segment, further improving regional mobility.

“In this framework CIRA is proposing a joint Campania-Apulia initiative,” says Schiano. Both regions are eligible for Objective One funding and with the addition of regional funding could total a research initiative of the order of €50 million (362.5 million).}

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