

## **The Mission of the Smart Region Project**

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The Smart Region Project - Age Management in Innovative Regions – takes place within the Framework of the European Social Fund – Innovative Measures which determines it in the direction of the decisions taken by the Council in Lisbon, Stockholm and Barcelona.

The key issues dealt with by the project are the effects of demographic developments on regional labour markets and the role of early retirement in this context.

It is a common idea that the function of research projects is to permit advances to be made in the various branches of science by improving what is already being known. This is true, in fact, but there are situations where such a perception becomes limitative. One of these situations occurs when structural data undergo essential changes; another, much more seldom, situation rises in the transition phase between the exhaustion of a system and the birth of another.

The Smart Region Project is subject to both these situations.

The Industrial Revolution has permitted the nations to become rich, which, in turn, has led to the spreading of well-being to a large portion of social strata. The consequences of this “generalization” have been multiple; for the area of research to which this project is dedicated, one of these consequences is of essential importance: the enormous increase of life-expectancy since the end of the nineteenth century until today and its effects in the world of labour. Any research in the field of work has to take this structural change into consideration. However, it was exactly the Industrial Revolution which in its final phase has brought about the technological transformation (namely micro-electronics) that is to supply one of the instruments to be used in the search of solutions for the problem of longevity – and its consequences for labour and finance.

We are saying “final phase” of the Industrial Revolution in a double sense: because we refer to its most recent phase, but also, because it coincides with systematic

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manifestations of the exhaustion of the system that was brought about by it. To consider these manifestations as aspects of a third industrial revolution which, in terms of a cyclic analysis, would be the recovery phase of the fourth Kondratjew cycle, is a limiting view of the more general transformations that are manifesting themselves far beyond the field of economics, involving technological, political, social, religious and cultural areas. Science has stopped being the criterion of truth; the implantation of what some insist in calling “globalization” has brought about scientific and technological realms that lead to the notion of knowledge going beyond the notion of science. This is one of the aspects that reveal the exhaustion of the system created by the Industrial Revolution. In the presence of this situation, therefore, studies of the world of labour cannot limit themselves to improve the mastery of what is already known. There is need for another attitude: to create new concepts as well as create innovation. Create what is necessary to solve the problems that emerge under new conditions in the transition phase between systems.

If the Smart Region project succeeds in taking one step in this direction, it will have fulfilled its mission.

The question, therefore, is not to research with a view to provide employment in the orthodox sense. Especially, because this type of employment not only will never return – no matter how much governments try to illude people with promises to create these jobs – but also because, to a large extent, it is not necessary. The new technologies (especially micro-electronics) alone permit the creation of a large part of wealth with successively less need of human employment. On the other hand – once the present state of well-being of our societies in terms of basic needs has been reached – what is necessary, is another type of production which will satisfy beyond belly and lodging: production that satisfies the higher-level needs reached by the populations of our societies, production that satisfies the human being beyond his/her material needs. The problem of unemployment exists in another perspective: employment is a criterion for the distribution of the wealth produced; if there is no employment, this means to a large extent the disappearance of the “code” – value paid as a result of working hours – for the distribution of wealth.

In view of this situation, it becomes necessary to “invent” new types of employment that correspond to the production necessary for the development level of our society – a society with greater longevity and needs of a higher level.

Once these “employments” are discovered, we shall possess the key to decode the new form of distributing wealth adequate to the state of development reached by today’s society.