



SHARING EXPERIENCE EUROPE
POLICY INNOVATION DESIGN

Case Studies in Design Policy & Programmes

This case study was developed as part of the SEE project. SEE is a network of eleven European partners sharing experience and stimulating debate on how to integrate design into innovation policies at regional, national and European levels.

© Design Wales, 2011

All rights reserved. Reproduction of parts of this publication may be made without seeking permission from Design Wales, on condition that reference is clearly made to the source of the material.

www.seeproject.org
www.designwales.org

IP Scan Project in Flanders

Belgium

This case study has a slightly different format to the others in the SEE Library, as it is drawn from the first SEE Policy Booklet: Integrating Design into Regional Innovation Policy (November 2009).



Regional governments across Europe are increasingly recognising how intellectual property rights (IPR) can be used effectively to consolidate successful innovation. Similarly, the European Commission has acknowledged that 'an adequate legal framework to protect knowledge properly is a precondition for an innovative society'.^[1] IPR systems play a significant role in helping businesses to gain and retain their innovation-based advantage.

From December 2008 to November 2010, the Flemish Government's Enterprise Agency is delivering a project co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) called the 'IP scan', which provides Flemish SMEs with a free consultation service on intellectual property rights management. The Enterprise Agency designed an 'IP scan' to identify individual SMEs' IP strengths and weaknesses in order to propose a course of action for optimisation. Following the scan, if further IP expertise is required (relating to copyright, branding, design, models, confidentiality, IP clauses in contracts etc.), additional advice up to the value of 1,200 Euros will be subsidised by the ERDF. The project aims to raise SMEs' awareness of IP assets and how to exploit them. The ERDF proposed that 200 SMEs participate in the IP scan and that 150 external recommendations be obtained.

IPR are not only available for technological innovation through a combination of patents, copyrights, industrial designs and trademarks, but also for new trends in management, services and systems. The memorandum from PRO INNO Europe on Removing barriers for a better use of IPR by SMEs asserts that IPR are instruments for leveraging commercial value from creativity, innovation and invention, and that policy measures are needed in order for SMEs to make better use of these instruments. Currently, SMEs are generally more inclined to use trade secrets rather than IPR as a form of protection due to the high cost and complexity of the IPR system.^[2] While IPR-related costs and the complexity of the process could hamper innovation, if used strategically IPR can become a dependable source of new, additional or higher revenue for SMEs. The PRO INNO memorandum recommends that IPR be considered as integral to business planning, but stresses that intellectual assets are insufficiently understood by SMEs as compared with their major competitors.^[3] The costs associated with IPR also discourage academics from commercialising their IPR, which could be achieved through alternative schemes like collaboration with industry and royalties rather than up-front fees.

For more information see Agentschap Ondernemen (available in Flemish): <http://www.vlao.be/>