

CENTRAL EUROPEAN TECH TRANSFER SPECIALISTS VISITING PEERS IN THE US

CERIM Study tour to Boston and Detroit 2010.03.09/12



Learning for the good of Central European technology transfer

15 Central European technology transfer specialists took part in a study tour to the US. The tour was organised through the CERIM-project which is implemented through the CENTRAL EUROPE Programme and co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The CERIM project, with 10 partner organisations from 7 countries, aims at developing and validating a model to enhance the transfer of technology and innovation from public research institutions and universities in Central Europe to existing businesses or new companies.

Made in Detroit

The first visit of the study tour was to Detroit and Tech Town which is Wayne State University's research and technology park. The 12-block park situated in former GM-facilities stimulates job growth and small-business creation by developing companies in emerging high-technology industries including advanced engineering, life sciences and alternative energy. Detroit has experienced severe challenges in the last decades due to a shrinking auto industry that used to be the city's sole provider. Its situation with a lack of innovative industry and high unemployment rates is rather similar to many parts of Central Europe. Therefore, it was interesting to see how well Tech Town has managed to build up its park, which now hosts about 70 companies and provides advanced incubation programmes for small high-tech companies from around the world looking for a first foot-hold in the US.

World-class technology transfer in Boston

The second part of the study tour was located to Boston where a broad number of organisations we were visited including MIT, Brigham and Women's Hospital (part of Harvard Medical School), Boston University and Massachuset Biotech Council. The region of Boston is considered one of the most advanced in the world concerning technology transfer. As we learned through our visits, this excellence can partly be explained by the world-class research going on at these universities, and partly by the, in European standards, great access to venture capital. Still at the MIT Entrepreneurship Forum a number of experienced venture capitalists and business angels complained about the Boston region lagging behind California in terms of early stage investments.

Later during the tour the MIT Technology Licensing Office was visited and they are probably one of the most successful technology transfer organisations in the US. In 2009, they filed 131 patents, closed 67 licensing agreements and had royalty revenue of about 70 million USD. However, the Director Lita Nelsen stressed that not many technology transfer organisations in the US, are as successful as them. Success factors are the entrepreneurial climate in Boston/Cambridge and among the faculty of MIT, great support from the upper administration of MIT, and highly motivated and experienced licensing managers.



Dr James Eliason (Tech Town) showing a hydrogen-gas station located at the NextEnergy's facilities, which is a research catalysts and business accelerators for alternative and renewable energy in Detroit.



CERIM-partners trying out a 3D-system for early diagnosis of breast cancer developed at the Smart Sensors and Integrated Microsystems Program at Wayne State University in Detroit.



The focus of the MIT Entrepreneurship Forum was early-stage financing of high-tech companies.



The Smart Sensors and Integrated Microsystems Program at Wayne State University in Detroit has a strong focus on industry-collaboration with the US Army and medical device companies in foremost.