

## News from the IRE Network Members

**Title:** RISforCCH project: UnBla.07 - A Conference without BlaBla 



**RIS Central Switzerland organised an 'UnBla' conference in January 2007. The aim of the event was to discuss how a whole region can be encouraged to remain innovative, what the characteristics of regional innovation are, and whether disturbances to people's traditional ways of thinking and acting can result in innovation.**

Regional Innovation was the main theme of the UnBla.07 conference organised at the end of January 2007, and Central Switzerland was the field of application. The project 'RIS for CCH' was one of the main organisers of the UnBla.07 conference, together with the Institute of Management and Regional Economics at Lucerne School of Business (the host), the Canton Lucerne, the ETH and the [Knowledge Board](#).

UnBla conferences are Un - Conferences that are productive instead of reproductive, where participants do not only listen, but also start talking to each other and work together. UnBla.07 was attended by 60 participants from 17 different countries. The organisers took care that there was a good mix of participants: 50% from the scientific and research community and 50% people from industry and consulting. UnBla.07 brought together regional and foreign people interested into the topic of regional innovation: The 'locals' provided as 'knowledge seekers' the context of the conference. Guests from outside - 'the travellers' - acted as 'knowledge carriers', as catalysts and fertilizers. They brought their own local knowledge from other parts of Europe and the world. In the conference, this knowledge has been brought together, assembled, and applied to the problem. Prof. Simone Schweikert, coordinator of the RISforCCH project, felt that the UnBla conference approach is the right one to reach the projects aims: "We aimed at generating an event where people from Central Switzerland can meet a truly international Community and engage in both meaningful conversation and real work related to questions about regional innovation."

UnBla.07 addressed the topic of Regional Innovation, and it was meant as an event targeting at people that the RISforCCH project team calls 'innovation culture leaders': people for whom innovation management is a central part of their life, people who show a strong passion for innovation and who drive changes in their working and private environment. Content wise, the UnBla.07 participants discussed within three days three core questions of the RISforCCH project:

1. How can we support a whole region to remain innovative? How is it possible to foster the desire a whole range of stakeholders with different roles and from a substantial variety of groupings and backgrounds to innovate and to take over responsibility for the development of a region?
2. What are the stories of regional innovators about? Where are differences and similarities between stories told in Central Switzerland and those told in other European countries, Israel, Russia and Canada? What are ingredients and spices of regional innovation?
3. How can disturbances in innovation processes help people breaking


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out of conventional lines of thought and accepted knowledge and thus can lead to innovation. How could this innovation be actively enabled? Can we plan the unexpected, can we 'Un-plan Innovation'?

The UnBla team facilitated these discussions through the use of unusual moderation methods.

For Prof. Schweikert and her team, the UnBla.07 conference provided various outcomes related to different dimensions of learning: "One important thing we wanted to look at and experiment with was how to organise an innovative event with a very special regional and international group. How do you keep travellers and locals on track, how do you balance between regional and global issues in conversations? Now we know! UnBla was a great opportunity to explore innovative methods to engage a heterogeneous group in meaningful conversation and sometimes even in generative dialogue.

Content wise, we gained during all sessions a lot of new insights and developed concrete ideas that will be used within the RIS project and beyond. We learned a lot from the experience of the travellers, but we also learned a lot about ourselves, about implicit unspoken assumptions we were carrying around. UnBla helped us to make them explicit and to discuss them. Thereby, we created a common understanding on issues concerning regional innovation that will help us in the upcoming difficult RIS project phases with developing scenarios and the regional innovation strategy for Central Switzerland.

One of our participants told me, that he was excited about the speed in which the UnBla team managed to build up trust in the group. I can only agree onto that. In my opinion, UnBla has been an important step stone for the RIS project towards becoming an active and appreciated member of the European Research Area."

The conference documentation including all videos is now available online at <http://www.2007.unbla.org/>.

## References

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