



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

KISS ME

Interreg Europe



THE KISS ME GOOD PRACTICES A SELECTION





FROM 1 JANUARY 2017 UNTIL THE END OF JUNE 2019 THE EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL, THE EGTC EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN, HAMAG-BICRO, HEDMARK COUNTY COUNCIL AND VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD HAVE WORKED TOGETHER IN THE FIRST PHASE OF THE INTERREG EUROPE PROJECT “KISS ME”. KISS ME, WHICH STANDS FOR “KNOWLEDGE AND INNOVATION STRATEGIES INVOLVING SMES”, AIMS TO IMPROVE THE INNOVATION CAPACITY AND COMPETITIVENESS OF SMES IN EUROPEAN BORDER REGIONS BY COMPARING AND SHARING GOOD PRACTICES FROM THE DIFFERENT REGIONS

REGIONS INVOLVED



Euregio Rhine-Waal
INTERREG VA Germany-Netherlands
www.euregio.org



Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean
Euroregional Innovation Strategy
www.euroregio.eu



HAMAG-BICRO
INTERREG VA Hungary-Croatia
www.hamagbicro.hr



Hedmark County Council
INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway
www.hedmark.org



Värmland County Administrative Board
INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway
www.lansstyrelsen.se/Varmland



Especially at times in which various challenges threaten the solidarity and unity among the EU-member states, it is important to set examples proving that we can achieve more if we work together and learn from each other.

Representing around 99 % of all enterprises within the EU, SMEs deserve special attention for a good reason. They are important contributors to European prosperity but can only survive on a competitive market, if they keep generating innovative products and services. However, due to their size and limited resources, they often face a number of challenges in this process. Especially in European border regions, the situation for SMEs is two-fold: on the one hand, border regions offer great opportunities, because there are markets of two or more countries in easy reach. On the other hand, borders still possess a barrier effect, although physically invisible. In order to make sure that SMEs can fully exploit the border regions’ potential in practice, it is essential for governments and public authorities to provide adequate support through tailored policy instruments. Unfortunately, as so often, this is easier said than done.

Thus, the partners of the KISS ME project have worked together for the last 2.5 years within the framework of the EU interregional cooperation programme Interreg Europe to identify ways to improve the supporting policy instruments for SMEs and better involve them in these schemes in practice. To achieve this objective, the KISS ME partners and their stakeholders have engaged

in an interregional learning process within the project. Every semester, the consortium and selected local stakeholders visited each other in their respective regions in order to get first-hand insights of successful approaches on site. In this process, a number of good practices were identified. These good practices are initiatives, such as projects or other concrete measures, which have already provided tangible and measurable results in better engaging SMEs in cross-border cooperation in one of the partner regions.

This brochure presents the most successful good practices that have been identified within the KISS ME project. They do not only illustrate the concrete results gained from the interregional learning process within the KISS ME project, but can also provide inspiration for other European regions to transfer these good practices in their regional context.

The close cooperation between different European regions and sharing good practices is what made the KISS ME project so successful. Although the project was primarily designed to improve knowledge and innovation strategies for SMEs in European border regions, it also sets a great example for the importance of European cooperation and solidarity in practice. The KISS ME consortium hopes that the identified good practices can inspire many other regions and have a sustainable impact.



THE KISS ME GOOD PRACTICES A SELECTION

EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL

- ★ ROCKET - OOST NL
- ★ YOUNG SMEs SUBSIDY SCHEME - EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL

EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN

- ★ CREAMED - EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN
- ★ CALL FOR EUROREGIONAL AND EUROPEAN CULTURAL COOPERATION PROJECTS - EUROREGION PYRENEES - MEDITERRANEAN

HAMAG-BICRO

- ★ PPI2INNOVATE - CENTRAL TRANSDANUBIAN REGIONAL INNOVATION AGENCY
- ★ EVLIA - UNIVERSITY OF PÉCS

HEDMARK COUNTY COUNCIL VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

- ★ MENTAL BORDER OBSTACLES (MBO) - VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD
- ★ ECOINSIDE - LILLESTROM CENTRE OF INNOVATION



EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL ABOUT

THE EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL IS CONVINCED THAT DUTCH AND GERMAN CITIZENS CAN ACHIEVE MORE IF THEY WORK TOGETHER. THEREFORE, IT SUPPORTS CROSS-BORDER ACTIVITIES IN THE DUTCH-GERMAN BORDER REGION IN A VARIETY OF WAYS!

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The Euregio Rhine-Waal is a Dutch-German public body with 55 member organisations including municipalities, regional governments, and chambers of commerce from the border region. Its most important objective is to improve and intensify cross-border collaboration, both economically and socially. Within the Euregio Rhine-Waal's area of operation, there is strong potential for significant economic and social development. Thus, the Euregio brings partners together to launch joint initiatives and benefit from synergies.

Many cross-border initiatives are co-funded by the EU's regional policy programme "INTERREG Germany-Netherlands". Within the programme, numerous regional projects are implemented.

In addition, the Euregio Rhine-Waal also represents the interests of its members and the citizens of the Dutch-German border region with Dutch, German and EU institutions in all areas relevant to society, reaching from economy and industry, to infrastructure, education and culture. It also functions as a platform for various target groups within the region, supporting initiatives such as the Euregional Forum for cross-border health insurance or the round table initiative for public order and security.

Policy Instrument involved:

INTERREG VA Germany-Netherlands

REGIONAL COLLABORATION ON KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES: STIMULATING INNOVATIVE SMES FROM GERMANY AND THE NETHERLANDS INTO JOINTLY DESIGNING PRODUCTS BASED ON DEVELOPMENTS IN KEY ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES (KETS).

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ROCKET is the engine that brings comprehensive economic competences on KETs in the German-Dutch border area together, and that builds and deploys a measurable and future-oriented economic development.

It became evident that processes for project submissions for SMEs to receive funding would often be too bureaucratic and time consuming. Sometimes SMEs faced the challenge that the time between the submission of a project plan and its final approval was so long, that the goals were no longer relevant by the time of the project's approval. This was especially true for fast paced, high-tech innovations, such as those in the area of Key Enabling Technologies. Thus, in the Dutch-German border region, the ROCKET project was created as an "umbrella" to better respond to this barrier. A consortium of core partners facilitates and simplifies the administrative process of the project proposals in order to relieve SMEs from bureaucratic hassles. This ensures an application process that is quicker and more transparent, and helps SMEs to focus more on their project's content and implementation. Moreover, since a Dutch-German cross-border collaboration is a requirement of the INTERREG A Germany-Netherlands programme, under which the ROCKET project is running, another potential obstacle is finding suitable partners across the border. Many organizations operate in half a circle and do not take advantage of cross-border opportunities, regarding both technological capabilities and market opportunities. The core-partners in ROCKET have a strong network and expertise in developments in the KETs.



A major benefit is their hands-on approach in providing support for finding suitable partners. This opens up entirely new networks for the SMEs involved.

Cross-border SME innovation projects that are approved under the umbrella of ROCKET are then stimulated through adequate funding, and the facilitated exchange and dissemination of expertise among the core partners' networks.

So far, ROCKET has rendered 11 innovation projects, 7 feasibility studies, and over 40 new products based on KETs in healthcare, manufacturing and energy.

Resources needed

The total budget of the ROCKET project is 9,994,868.76 EUR.

Evidence of success

Within the framework of the ROCKET project, 7 feasibility studies and 11 innovation projects have been funded, and successfully executed. Topics range from new inspection methods for improved fuel cells for hydrogen cars, to nanotechnology for better diabetes treatment, or new materials for improved DNA-swabs and subsequent analysis to improve efficiency in law enforcement. Importantly, throughout the project, long-lasting and durable cross-border connections have been made that are proving to be extremely valuable. These

connections would in most cases not be possible without an incentive such as ROCKET.

During the last 'call for projects' the requested amount of funds was far larger than the remaining budget indicating the attractiveness of such a framework for SMEs. ROCKET's hands-on approach has also led to the project being selected by the European Commission as a "best practice" example for stimulating innovation in Key Enabling Technologies. These indications resulted in an application for a follow-up project, called ROCKET Reloaded, which has recently been approved.

Difficulties encountered

For the successful cooperation within such a project, it is crucial to create a basis of transparency, trust and frequent communication in order to ensure a smooth implementation. Any lack of these variables results in frustration with the applicants.

Potential for learning or transfer

The consortium is made up of core partners with a strong network in their particular region and/or technical sector, such as Clusters or regional business development agencies. These core partners have close contacts with the SMEs in their network. The core partners deal with the main bureaucratic issues and generate application forms that are as simple and "unbureaucratic" as possible, so that the threshold for participation is as low possible. Moreover, the core partners offer the SMEs technical assistance in filling out the forms, help them to find suitable partners, and function as their first contact points for information or questions. Since the SMEs regularly work and have worked with the core partners, they already know and trust them. Therefore, the core consortium is able to attract and involve SMEs in the project and cross-border cooperation far more easily.

An "open project", such as ROCKET, can only be successful with a consortium of core partners that has a certain level of trust, a strong and broad network with relevant SMEs in the region, and at least one core partner with sufficient experience with the specific programme regulations. This ensures that the focus can be put on achieving results.

Access good practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1926>

★ YOUNG SMEs SUBSIDY SCHEME EUREGIO RHINE-WAAL

FOSTERING INNOVATION IN YOUNG ENTERPRISES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

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The Knowledge Alliance Rhine-Waal aims to strengthen the cooperation of entrepreneurs, unis and research institutions on both sides of the German-Dutch border. It focuses particularly on young research-intensive companies and entrepreneurial students. It supports the development of new products, provides assistance to both entrepreneurs and students, and simplifies the search for partners, labs and research institutions on both sides of the border.

The "Young SMEs Subsidy Scheme" is one initiative of the Knowledge Alliance. It fosters innovation in young enterprises with grants of max. 70 % and max. 70,000 EUR awarded to young enterprises from both side of the German-Dutch border working together on the realisation of innovative products.

Working together on these innovation projects, the students acquire entrepreneurial skills in an international context. An entrepreneurship-toolbox for lecturers in universities was developed and implemented to provide guidance for the students; training programmes, such as entrepreneurship classes offer the young entrepreneurs coaching for their innovation process. A so-called Science Compass, set up online within the framework of the project, provides users with an overview over available expertise, contacts and facilities in the border region in several scientific areas.



Resources needed

Out of the total budget of 4.5 million EUR of the Knowledge Alliance Rhine-Waal, the budget for the Young SMEs Subsidy Scheme amounted to 1.5 million EUR.

Evidence of success

Within the Young SMEs Subsidy Scheme, 15 innovation projects were implemented, taking up 1.4 million EUR. Many young entrepreneurs gained experiences in entrepreneurship and cross-border cooperation. Moreover, by means of the initiative, the region was able to work on the building of its image as a start-up region.

Out of 15 innovation project, 4 projects resulted in new market products; 2 projects improved the product range of existing SMEs; 5 innovative products are currently still in development. Among the financed SMEs, the survival rate amounted to 80 % - the comparable survival rate in the peer group is 67 %. 2 SMEs started Joint Ventures; 5 of 15 supported SMEs are currently still active in cross-border cooperation. 1 SME is now completely internationalised; 6 SMEs experienced an employment growth.

Difficulties encountered

Sustainable financing beyond the project duration was often difficult to find. Due to the regulations of the programme, projects cannot be repeated in the same way or simply prolonged.

Potential for learning or transfer

Essential factors for the "Young SMEs subsidy scheme" to successfully stimulate cross-border cooperation, internationalisation and innovation in young SMEs are the following points:

- a relatively high subsidy rate (e.g. max. 70 % and max. 70,000 EUR)
- offering assistance in writing project proposals
- offering assistance in finding a relevant partner in the neighbouring country/region
- a short term application procedure
- a clearly structured grant system
- a competent jury judging the projects' innovativeness, business and entrepreneurship potential

After the subsidy is granted, an appropriate support and control system is needed (a) for carrying out the project and (b) for the correct and smooth implementation of the subsidy scheme. Also, the science compass provides an easy tool to get an overview of existing expertise, contacts and facilities in the region and thus, facilitates the building of partnerships.

Access best practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1915>





EUROREGION PYRENEES- MEDITERRANEAN ABOUT

THE EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN, FOUNDED IN 2004, IS A COOPERATIVE POLITICAL PROJECT INVOLVING THE REGIONS OF CATALONIA, BALEARIC ISLANDS, AND OCCITANIE.

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The aim of the Euroregion is to create a sustainable development cluster in the North-Western Mediterranean region based on innovation and the social and economic integration of the territory. As such, the Euroregion contributes to the construction of a united, solidarity-based Europe attuned to the concerns and experiences of its citizens.

The Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean wants to confirm its position as a territory committed to fostering and defending projects essential to achieving balanced, sustainable development on the European scale. The Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean strives to improve its international competitiveness while putting people at the core of its actions and priorities. By fostering links between its technological, scientific and cultural centers, the Euroregion Pyrenees Mediterranean intends to become a hub of innovation and sustainable growth

Policy Instrument involved:

Euroregional Innovation Strategy

★ CREAMED

EUROREGION PYRENEES- MEDITERRANEAN

CREATING A EUROREGIONAL NETWORK OF BUSINESS INCUBATORS TO STIMULATE INNOVATION AND TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

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CreaMed, a project which ran within the framework of the INTERREG IV B SUDOE programme between November 2010 and June 2013, was launched with the objective to structure the territory of the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean by organising existing regional support systems for enterprise creation and development in a coherent, coordinated way.

The CreaMed project was aimed at creating a network of business incubators to stimulate innovation and encourage exchanges between young companies and complementarities in order to foster business incubation and economic development, particularly on an international scale.

CreaMed consisted of and benefited from the following Euroregional partnership:

- Pyrenees-Mediterranean EGTC, the project leader.
- Government of Catalonia, Ministry for Business and Labour, Directorate General for the
- REZOPEP, the Midi-Pyrenees Business Incubator Network, which includes 20 incubators;
- SYNERSUD, an association accountable to the regional Council of Languedoc-Roussillon, made up of 19 support structures for the creation and development of innovative businesses;

- Parc Bit, a technological innovation park accountable to the Government of the Balearic Islands;
- Midi-Pyrenees Expansion, the economic development agency of the Midi-Pyrenees region.

Resources needed

The total budget of the CreaMed project is 1,477,249.61 EUR

Evidence of success

A dynamic network of incubators, currently encompassing 89 support structures (100 locations), provided support for over 1,400 innovation-oriented firms. Internship programs for university students were also activated. A “Business Passport” guided the companies involved. The CreaMed incubators also adopted quality standards and a certification label for supporting new Euroregional businesses and networks.

Potential for learning or transfer

Entrepreneurial support structures, such as business incubators, accelerators or clusters, are important tools to help start-ups and SMEs to be successful in business. When receiving support through these structures, the number of companies being successful in business is much higher than without support, as well as their innovation perception.

The creation of a Euroregional network has had a positive impact in each of the regional territories, often becoming a tool for its structuration and development through cooperation. The methodology of CreaMed responds to a common need in many regions and is easily transferable to other regions, also a cross-border context.

Access good practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2267>



★ CALL FOR CULTURAL COOPERATION PROJECTS EUROREGION PYRENEES-MEDITERRANEAN

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EUROREGIONAL CALL AIMED AT DEVELOPING AND STRUCTURING PARTNERSHIPS OF EUROREGIONAL ACTORS ENCOURAGING THEM TO SUBMIT EUROPEAN PROJECTS.

This call, managed entirely by the Euroregion Pyrenees-Mediterranean, aims at strengthening and expanding existing cooperation, launching new projects with the potential to have an impact in the territory, and contributing to structuring the territory. The call supports both artistic creation (e.g. live performance, contemporary art, audio-visual work, Euroregional languages, music, and literature) and the development of tangible and intangible heritage. It aims at professional cultural organisations governed by private law, professional artists, SMEs and public-sector organisations, such as museums, libraries, archives, universities, and orchestras, established in the territory of the Euroregion. Since 2015, the call encourages partnerships in the submission of applications within the framework of European programmes in the period 2014-2020. The call especially focuses on the Creative Europe Programme. The objective is to identify and generate projects distinguished by their Euroregional profile in terms of creative innovation.

Resources needed

For the years 2010-2018, the total budget of the call for Euroregional and European Cultural Cooperation has been 1,370,000 EUR. Projects receive a funding rate of 60 %.

Evidence of success

Between 2010 and 2018, 117 projects have been submitted; 44 projects have been approved. Within the framework of the approved cooperation projects, more than 150 cultural organisations have been supported.

Difficulties encountered

Actors in the same sector in each region are aware of each other, but often have only a partial or anecdotal knowledge of actors in the other regions and/or other sectors. Especially for partner consortiums with no or only limited experience in European projects, the success rate of project applications is rather low.

Potential for learning or transfer

The Call for Euroregional and European Cultural Cooperation Projects responds to a double objective: firstly, to structure the actors in the territory to create sustainable networks and, secondly, to help them access European funds through innovative cooperation projects. Both are important challenges in many European regions, also in a cross-border context.

Access best practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2326/>





HAMAG-BICRO

ABOUT

HAMAG-BICRO IS THE CROATIAN AGENCY FOR SMES, INNOVATIONS AND INVESTMENTS, ESTABLISHED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA WITH THE PURPOSE TO ENHANCE SME DEVELOPMENT, TO CATALYSE THE INNOVATION PROCESS AND TO PROMOTE INVESTMENT.

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It is an independent institution under the supervision of the Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts.

The main objective is to support the development of SMEs improving the innovation process and encouraging investments, and to create a unique system that provides support to entrepreneurs through all development stages of operation – from research and development of an idea, to its commercialization and placement on the market.

This is done through promoting investment, issuing guarantees for bank credits to SMEs, implementing grant schemes, providing micro-loans and supporting the innovation process.

Policy Instrument involved:
INTERREG VA Hungary-Croatia

★ PPI2INNOVATE

CENTRAL TRANSDANUBIAN REGIONAL INNOVATION AGENCY



PUBLIC PROCUREMENT OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS.

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The public sector demands innovative solutions that are not yet available or not on the market at large scale, and thus, forces providers to innovate. Public Procurement of Innovative Solutions (PPI) is well supported on the European level (i.e. Horizon 2020). Also, various guidance and training tools have already existed a few years. So far, however, they failed to boost PPI usage in the majority of central European regions because the available tools are not customized to national frameworks, and regional knowledge hubs are missing. The PPI2Innovate project will achieve this change by delivering innovative outputs, such as three thematic PPI2Innovate tools for SMART Health, SMART Energy and SMART ICT, fully customized and translated to six national institutional frameworks. In addition, the project will create 6 regional Competence Centers for PPI for their Central European network, as well as 6 action plans to implement 8 PPI projects in each region. 4 PPI pilots will strengthen linkages to apply a trans-regional “learning by doing approach” and illustrate success stories in the field of PPI in the 4 pilot regions.

Resources needed

The total budget of the PPI2Innovate project is 1,661,148 EUR

Evidence of success

A transregional study on institutional frameworks with regard to PPI, as well as a Guidebook for smart PPI tools have been published. Moreover, 3 thematic tools

for Smart Health, SMART Energy and SMART ICT have been established and translated in 6 languages.

Potential for learning or transfer

The PPI2Innovate projects aims to build capacity for the usage of innovation procurement. In doing so, it emphasizes the PPI procedure: Public procurement of innovative solutions among public institutions in order to improve overall public services.

3 PPI2Innovate tools in the fields of Smart Energy, Smart Health and Smart ICT were developed in connection with a map of 8 promising PPI projects running in Croatia. The project is also aimed at establishing Innovation Procurement Competence Centres. As previously mentioned, the project also creates a PPI network and provides “know-how packages” with the results from the learning-by-doing approach applied in the practices of the PPI2Innovate project partners for developing PPI pilots. Finally, the PPI2Innovate project will also raise awareness for and highlight the benefits of PPI procedures to the SMEs and the wider public.

Access best practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2022/>

EVALUATION OF INTANGIBLE ASSETS PROVIDING FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR SMES (EVLIA): MAKING FULL VALUE OF GOOD IDEAS BY LEVERAGING INTELLECTUAL ASSETS FOR FINANCING SMES IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

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Intangible assets and the value of intellectual property play a decisive role in all phases of a company's life cycle. Assets of all kinds, including intangible assets, such as intellectual capital, have to be evaluated and appraised within the financial accounting process implemented by companies and within the valuation process carried out by financial professionals. The information on the value of the company's intangible assets can then be used in market transactions on asset markets or for transactions on financial markets. The EVLIA project focuses on the development of a suitable valorisation methodology for intangible assets. An evaluation framework and a standard of indicators, that define the frame of evaluation, were created. Main stakeholders in the project were the Intellectual Property Offices in the region and actors possessing expert knowledge of evaluation processes for intangible assets and intellectual properties. Operators were trained for the evaluation and several pilot actions were initiated. The EVLIA evaluation tool was made available through a digital platform.

Resources needed

The total budget of the PPI2Innovate project is 1,920,100 EUR

Evidence of success

An EVLIA tool has been elaborated and digitally published. Moreover, operators were trained; intangible assets and intellectual property value of 45 SMEs were evaluated by financial intermediaries according to the project's methodologies.

Difficulties encountered

Throughout the project, differing legal regulations and frameworks, especially with regard to confidentiality matters, presented obstacles for the project's implementation.

Potential for learning or transfer

Thanks to the project, an integrated platform aiming to facilitate the access for SMEs and potential entrepreneurs to financial resources, promoting innovative services and meetings with financial operators, was established. The ELVIA service helps SMEs to identify the most important Intangible Assets of their enterprise and provides them with an applicable method for the correct and comprehensive valorisation of these intangible resources in order to help them improve their business. Additionally, further training on evaluation methods of intangible assets and targeted funding opportunities in the fields of eco-innovation, energy efficiency and renewable energies are provided. The project also offers a concrete step-by-step approach to raise awareness for intangible assets among entrepreneurs.

Access best practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2023/>



EVLIA

Making full value of good ideas by leveraging
intellectual assets for financing SMEs in SEE



HEDMARK COUNTY COUNCIL ABOUT

HEDMARK IS SITUATED IN THE EASTERN PART OF NORWAY AND HAS 197 000 INHABITANTS. HEDMARK COUNTY COUNCIL IS A DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED BODY WITH REGIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES.

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The main tasks of the County Council is to act as regional developer in the areas of public transport, road systems, business development, climate, environment and culture. The County Council is also responsible for education and welfare services which are inter-municipal or too large for an individual municipality to deliver on its own. Hedmark County Council is the Norwegian Managing Authority and Secretariat for the Interreg Sweden-Norway Inner Scandinavia program.

Policy Instrument involved:
INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway



VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD ABOUT

VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD IS A GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY THAT EXISTS IN CLOSE PROXIMITY TO THE PEOPLE.

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It is an important link between the people and the municipal authorities on the one hand, and the government, parliament and central authorities on the other.

The County Administrative Board is responsible for ensuring that decisions from the parliament and the government are implemented, and coordinates government activities. With regard to the county's development, it shall safeguard and work for the interests of both individuals and society.

Värmland County Administrative Board is also a regional part in the EU with a responsibility to support and work for the EU Cohesion Policy and support Värmland to be internationally active. International cooperation at regional level helps to support economic, environmental and social sustainable development in the county and contributes to the development of ideas, people and organisations. Värmland County Administrative Board helps to make this possible and works successfully with international partnerships, long-term strategic contacts and alliances in Europe

Policy Instrument involved:
INTERREG VA Sweden-Norway

★ MENTAL BORDER OBSTACLES (MBO) VÄRMLAND COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE BOARD

SWEDEN AND NORWAY FACE CHALLENGES TO INCREASE BUSINESS COLLABORATION BETWEEN THEM - WHAT MENTAL BORDER OBSTACLES HINDER BUSINESSES FROM GOING CROSS-BORDER?

Over generations, people in Sweden and Norway have had a strong exchange with each other and once belonged to the same nation. Although physically invisible, the border between the two countries still presents some barriers, especially for companies, which work cross-border between Sweden and Norway. In order to sustainably deconstruct these barriers and further increase cross-border collaboration, it is crucial to identify the most pressing obstacles that impede people or business from going and working cross-border. On the initiative of Värmland County Administrative Board, the Øresund Institute conducted a study to examine these obstacles. Based on in-depth interviews with around 50 SMEs and 13 business organisations located along the entire Swedish-Norwegian border, 6 mental border obstacles (MBOs) hindering business owners to work cross-border were identified. One of the results illustrated that geographic variations, industry affiliation and the proximity to the border strongly affect the extent to which entrepreneurs experience mental barriers. Resulting from the study's findings, 23 initiatives aiming to deconstruct mental border obstacles and to increase cross-border activities between Norway and Sweden were set up. These initiatives included measures to promote transnational thinking among businesses through cross-border networking events; To increase knowledge about the other countries' culture and society in general through a trans-border news service focusing on the business sector; To enhance knowledge and exchange in education through promoting studies and work exchanges abroad in Norway and Sweden. Businesses along the



border will benefit from the findings of the study on mental border obstacles. This will ultimately help to intensify cross-border cooperation between Sweden and Norway.

Resources needed

For this study, it was crucial to find relevant study participants for the qualitative examination by interview. Financial resources depend on the scope of the study.

Evidence of success

The 6 mental border obstacles identified were the following:

- 1 national attraction,
- 2 "it never occurred to me" - the importance of surroundings and network,
- 3 staying in one's comfort zone,
- 4 experiencing concrete problems & formal obstacles,
- 5 the image of "the others",
- 6 differences in business culture.

Based on the study's findings, 23 concrete initiatives are launched to deconstruct the MBOs increasing cross-border activities of SMEs between Norway and Sweden and benefitting the future development in the region.

Potential for learning or transfer

When looking at measures to increase the cross-border activities of businesses it is important to keep in mind that every business is ultimately run by “ordinary people”. There might be a number of mental border obstacles keeping these people from working cross-border. Therefore, in order to increase cross-border activities of SMEs, it is often crucial to have awareness for mental border obstacles, identify and deconstruct them. A comprehensive, qualitative study can be a useful tool when assessing mental border obstacles within a region. In doing so, the methodology of in-depth interviews can be an instructive tool. The findings of studies on the subject of mental border obstacles carried out in other European regions could be compared. This can give meaningful insights in the state-of-play in different European regions and present input for concrete actions.

Access good practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/1955>

★ ECOINSIDE LILLESTROM CENTRE OF INNOVATION

THE ECOINSIDE PROJECT TACKLES CLIMATE-DRIVEN GROWTH IN INNER SCANDINAVIA, A CROSS-BORDER REGION CONTAINING THE 4 REGIONS AKERSHUS & HEDMARK IN NORWAY, AND DALARNA & VÄRMLAND IN SWEDEN.

Committed to green economic development through cross-border cooperation, the project aims to achieve added value and present solutions to environmental and climate challenges. In doing so, the project utilises different skills and strengths, and establishes cooperation between business, research and innovation environments across the border. ecoINSIDE has developed a systematised approach to attract foreign investments and new international cooperation partners for innovative companies in the green industry sector.

The approach consists of the following steps:

Firstly, a common web site is launched on which innovative companies in the green industry sector showcase their solutions. This enables interested investors and potential cooperation partners to find suitable companies easily and quickly. They choose the companies or innovative solutions that best fit their needs. Secondly, they contact the “Green Visits Secretariat” which handles the request. Moreover, the Secretariat facilitates the matchmaking and arranges a work visit program. By means of the Green Visits Secretariat, an efficient and targeted way to stimulate potential cooperation and partnerships is ensured. Similarly organised secretariats on both sides of the border enable smooth matchmakings and cross-border visits.

Resources needed

The total budget of the ecoINSIDE project is 4,452,772 EUR.

Evidence of success

The private-public partnership models in the project have created new opportunities for the businesses involved. 224 companies have received support, e.g. through feasibility studies, their participation in innovation projects, etc. Moreover, the project supported 45 new products to access new markets.

The access to test beds and competences on the other side of the border has benefitted companies and research institutions on both sides of the border.

Potential for learning or transfer

The ecoINSIDE project presents an efficient and targeted way to stimulate potential cooperation and partnerships. By means of the website, there is one common access point to innovative companies, products and solutions in the region; potential investors and cooperation partners can choose companies, products and solutions tailored to their needs. The secretariat ensures that the request management and the matchmaking is handled in a professional and centralised manner.

Access best practice in Interreg Europe Database:

<https://www.interregeurope.eu/policylearning/good-practices/item/2016>



IMPRINT

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