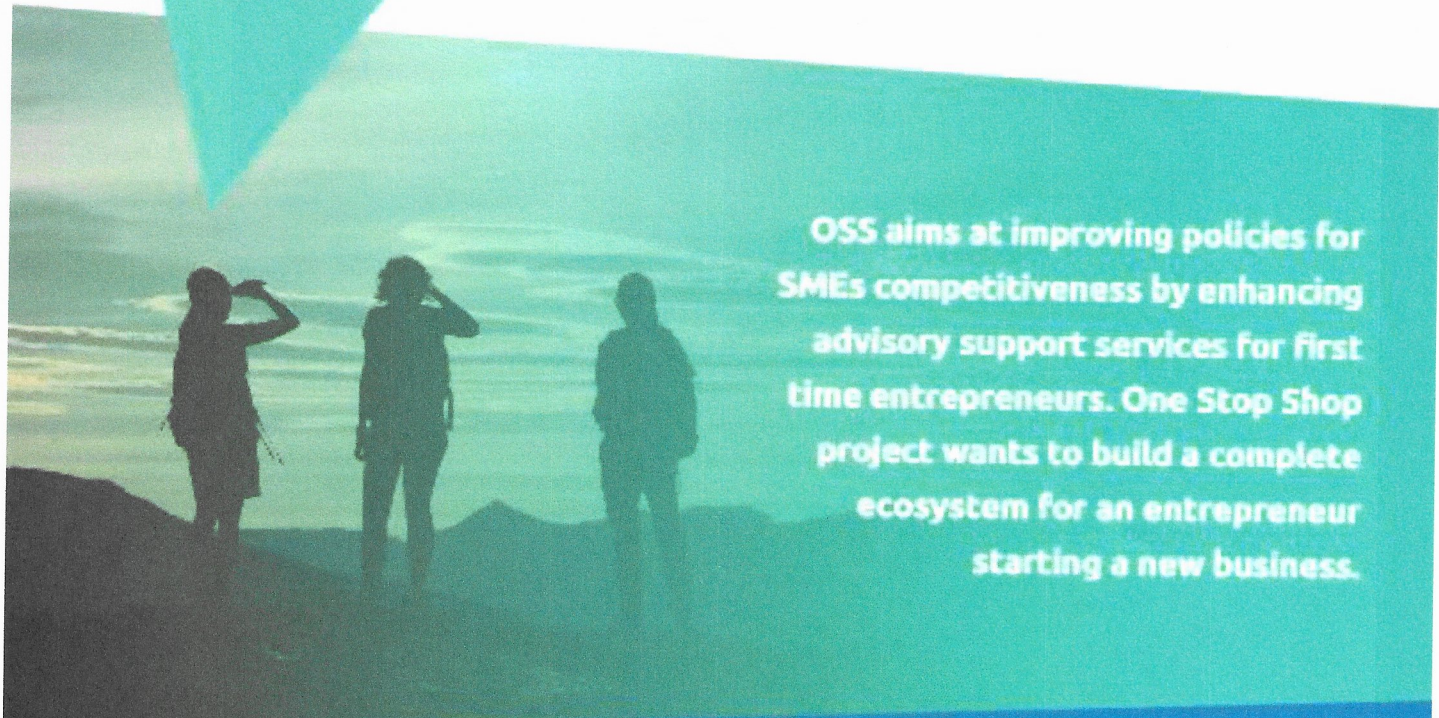




OSS
Interreg Europe



OSS aims at improving policies for SMEs competitiveness by enhancing advisory support services for first time entrepreneurs. One Stop Shop project wants to build a complete ecosystem for an entrepreneur starting a new business.

www.interregeurope.eu/oss

OSS – One Stop Shop towards competitive SMEs, focusing on the ecosystem for the first line service system

BSC Kranj, Slovenia

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** The content of this document is based on collected useful experience and good practices from the Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, BSC Kranj as project partner in the OSS project co-funded by INTERREG Europe. The proposals have been identified as good practices from other partner countries and regions in the project and based on the needs of SMEs in Slovenia, with focus on ecosystems for the first line service system.*

PART I – General information

1 ABOUT THE PROJECT

1.1 General information

PROJECT	OSS – One Stop Shop towards competitive SMEs, focusing on the ecosystem for the first line service system
PARTNER ORGANISATION	Regional Development Agency of Gorenjska, BSC Kranj
OTHER PARTNER ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED (IF RELEVANT)	N/A
COUNTRY	Slovenia
NUTS2 REGION	Zahodna Slovenija, Gorenjska
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1.2 About the project

According to statistic, Europe has a lower rate of start-ups compared with other parts of the world, e.g., US and Asia. We need to offer attractive jobs and places to live in our region for young people and boost their entrepreneur's spirit before they leave our countries. We could support this cause with attractive tailor-made ecosystem for start-ups and by that we will improve SMEs growth, entrepreneur skills and help them overcome barriers on their entrepreneurial path. In the OSS project the project partners have defined commitment and willingness to influence their policies which is important for increasing the number and quality of startups in their region.

Main objective of OSS project is to create One Stop Shop towards competitive SMEs, focusing on the ecosystem for the first line service system project is to improve existing policies for SMEs competitiveness by enhancing advisory support services for first time entrepreneurs. As a result, OSS aims to build a complete ecosystem for entrepreneurs that are starting new business.

To achieve that, every partner will contribute with its expertise and best practices from their first line service system. Final output of OSS initiative is the design of a Toolbox of experience and expertise. The consortium will also enhance the advisory support service adapted to the needs of the entrepreneurs.

2 GORENJSKA REGION

Gorenjska is an alpine region in the northwestern part of Slovenia, which covers 10.5% of the total area of the country and thus ranks 6th in terms of size among statistical regions. 10% of the total Slovenian population lives in the region, which represents 204,670 inhabitants. It has a good traffic position as it lies on the X. European Motorway and Railway Corridor. In Gorenjska, the number of business entities is growing, however, we still have more active working staff than jobs. Wages are lower than the national average, and the educational structure of workers is improving.

2.1 Good practices from project partners

2.1.1 Analysis of the Hoppid.no system

The county Møre og Romsdal is located in the Western part of Norway, just by the sea, and is home to more than 250,000 inhabitants, of which about a fifth live in the urban area of Ålesund. With a population density of about 18 inhabitants per square kilometre, the county of Møre og Romsdal is a relatively sparsely populated region when compared to other European countries. Still, it is representative in terms of population density for other Norwegian counties. To boost the local entrepreneurial ecosystem, the county authority of Møre og Romsdal established hoppid.no in 2007, a network of 29 start-up offices in the 26 municipalities of the county. Acknowledged as a Good Practice by Interreg Europe (2020), this freely accessible tool aims to increase internationalisation and enable the founding of innovative, new firms in the region.

For this purpose, they provide interested individuals and teams with the opportunity to receive professional advice from some 50 local advisors (as of May 2020), take advantage of educational videos, courses, and networking opportunities. Thus, either kick-start or further accelerate their business. Moreover, the start-ups can also apply for funds of up to 3,000€, for instance, for filing patents or piloting designs. With hoppid.no, Møre og Romsdal follows the ethos below, as discussed in the hoppid.no steering committee meeting by May-Britt Roald, the programme manager:

“You can be born global in rural areas with an entrepreneurial culture. It’s all about attractiveness for the people and how we connect good ideas and entrepreneurs in the environments” (OSS Project, 2020)

Figure 1 outlines the process for signing up and commencing the journey with hoppid.no. Interested individuals and teams are first asked to provide basic contact details before specifying the phase of their business (e.g., only idea or already in development) and more detailed background information about their project to provide context for later engagements. Subsequently, the team members (if applicable) can be added to the system. With a range of short educational videos, the new members receive practice-focused guidance on various relevant aspects of their future business plan.

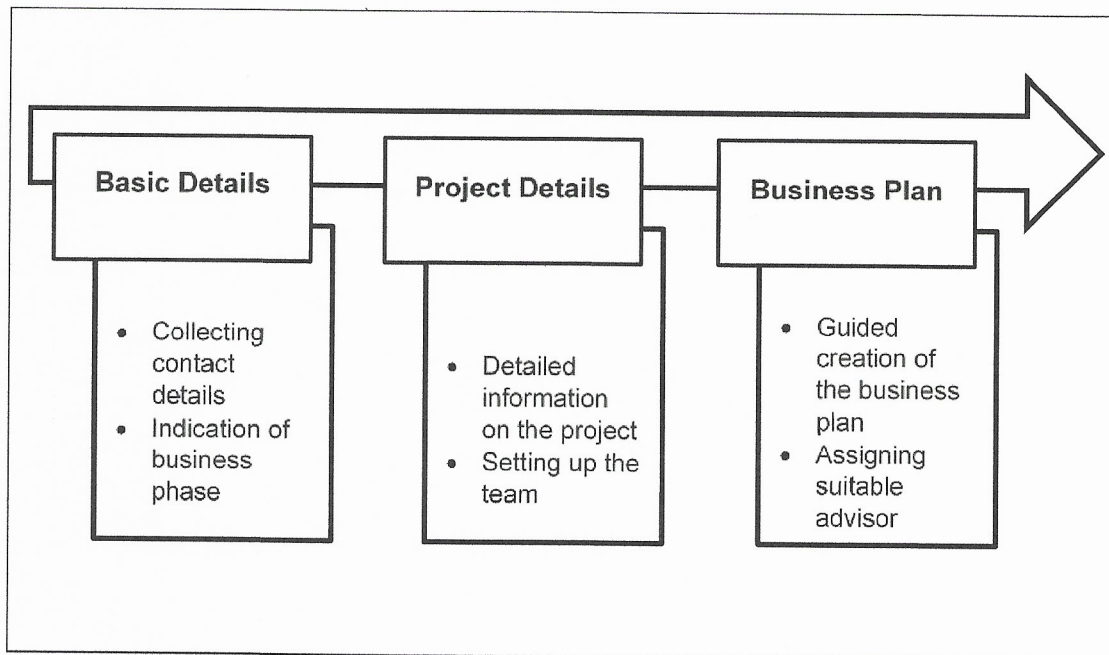


Figure 1: hoppid.no underlying process

After studying the videos (see figure 2 as an example), the individuals and teams can then develop their idea further, by delving deeper into the underlying resources, the purpose of the business, as well as the specifics of the idea. By doing so, the tool enables them to build a visual representation of their business plan as a basis for the engagement with their assigned advisor. It bears noting that the pool of advisors consists of a diverse set of certified and highly skilled professionals with experience from various industries, including CEOs, consultants, project managers, and public servants. Furthermore, concerning age and gender, this pool of advisors benefits from strong diversity. A brief bio on each of the advisors and contact details are provided on the hoppid.no website. The advisor assigned to the respective project can be contacted already throughout the process of creating the business plan in a chat window, also allowing the users to schedule a meeting.

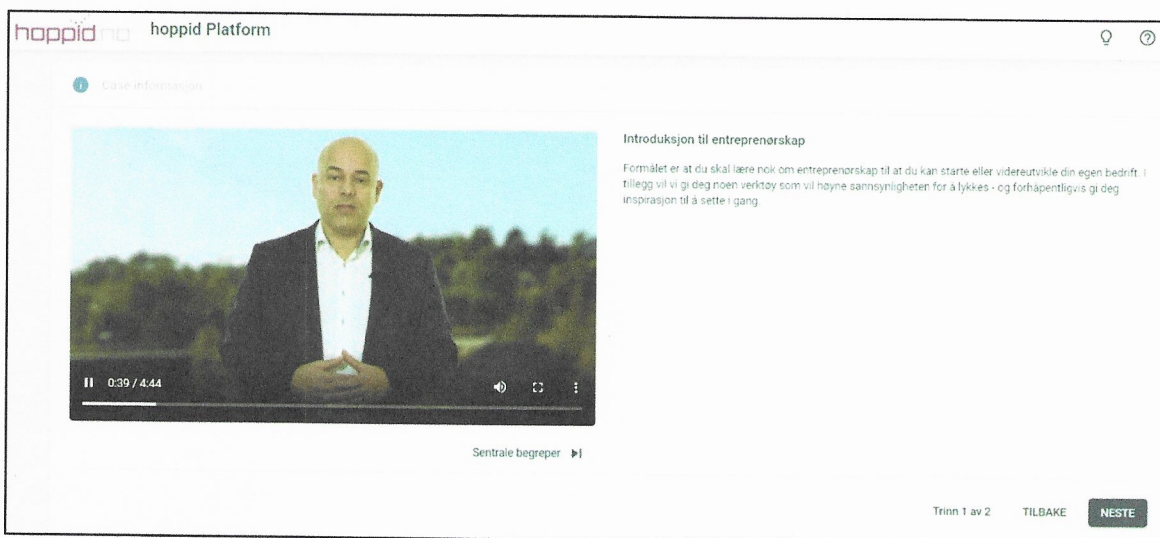


Figure 2: Example of an educational video on hoppid.no

2.1.2 The Nest (Vratsa, Bulgaria)

The Nest is the first rural coworking space that has found its place in North-West Bulgaria, in the town of Vratsa. Established by a local software company, the Vratsa Software Society, the idea behind setting up this collaborative workspace was to attract local knowledge workers and other alike who sought a shared and highly flexible work environment, interlace them in a supportive network and offer them the possibility to gain new knowledge, knit new relationships and empower through the means of collaborative work practices.

The Nest especially emphasises the content this coworking space has to offer to its user base. Having started with the organisation of programming courses, where attendees could learn new programming languages, they soon expanded their learning activities to a digital marketing course and a course on visual design. The management organised and hosted external events such as Hack Vratsa, Code Week Vratsa and the Rail Girls event to merge with other knowledge-based networks. What is more, the management made an effort to support local initiatives by offering them an event venue, established partnerships with other local and regional groups, and organising subsequent matchmaking events to bring more people together.



Figure 3: The Nest; source: nestcoworking.bg

To further explore and expand their potential, the management organised crowdfunding campaigns to successfully gather initial funds to kickstart key activities and secure the space's functioning. With that, The Nest remains one of the better practices of setting up a rural coworking space.

The key takeaways of establishing The Nest are the following:

1. Setting up a rural coworking space in a relatively undeveloped peripheral area can serve as means to empower local knowledge workers and interconnect them into an active collaborative community;

2. Strategic planning and organisation of events that a) support knowledge transfer and b) attract various interest groups of individuals and enable them to connect;
3. Seeking financial sources through crowdsourcing techniques supports identifying and branding a rural coworking environment as a community-orientated workplace.

2.2 Other good practices

2.2.1 Coworking Bansko (Bansko, Bulgaria)

The second space to be considered is Coworking Bansko which is located in the mountain town of Bansko, Bulgaria. Founded back in 2016 by German remote workers, Coworking Bansko quickly became one of the most recognised and well-known rural coworking spaces in Europe. Located in downtown Bansko, the coworking space boasts a diversified office space with a large garden that allows individuals to pursue their work tasks flexibly. Apart from a set of standard user memberships, Coworking Bansko also offers more profound packages that include accommodation offers in cooperation with local guesthouses and entrance to the local tourist infrastructure (e.g., hot springs, etc.).

In contrast to The Nest, Coworking Bansko predominantly focuses on attracting individuals from abroad by promoting the town of Bansko as a welcoming place for digital nomads and other remote working individuals. With that, the town and its name became an integral part of the coworking's branding and identity. The founders frequently promote the town and the surrounding region as a tax-friendly environment, stress how affordable and safe it is for living. During the last year, the coworking space and its founders built a lively community of individuals from various backgrounds who stayed in the Bansko area and joined the coworking space, but commonly use it as their base when travelling abroad and continuing their lifestyles as digital nomads.



Figure 4: Coworking Bansko; source: nove-monde.com

Similarly, to the previous good practice case, Coworking Banskó organises several events that aim to integrate the local crowd and attract individuals with similar interests.

The key takeaways overseeing the case of Coworking Banskó are the following:

1. It is vital to make the local environment a part of a coworking space's identity and subsequent branding. Doing so commonly results in a symbiotic relationship with locals and existing infrastructure;
2. Adapting the strategy to attract digital nomads from various backgrounds results in a more robust, well-knitted community that tends to share knowledge and shows a higher tendency towards collaborative activities; all whilst promoting openness and diversity;
3. Organising unique events and international conference may additionally attract individuals with a heterogeneous set of knowledge and experiences. Moreover, specialised events promote a rural coworking space among various interest groups and increase visibility on an international level.

2.2.2 Coconat (Bad Belzig, Germany)

Out of the three selected cases, Coconat has the most diversified site that offers plenty of activities and flexibility to attract a wide arrange of unlike users. The site revolves around the main building that hosts a coworking space and co-living quarters. On the other hand, a next-door barn serves as an event venue, a meeting room, a fabrication lab, a studio, and a food lab. The area is surrounded by several gardens and nature that offer a rather pristine contact with nature and hosts a campsite, a glamping area, an herb garden, and a sports area. Having a larger and varied site, Coconat's strategy focuses on offering a so-called workation retreat and enabling them to centralize their activities.

That being said, Coconat identifies three pillars on which they build their offer. First, the main target group is visitors who tend to stay at Coconat for a longer time (i.e., from a week onwards) and integrate themselves with everything the location offers. Second, their secondary (but equally important) target group is local inhabitants invited to either integrate themselves in the workplace or participate in other activities that they host and/or organize. Third, Coconat does its best to maintain a strong network of past, current and future users of their site. What is more, the network aims to proactively participate in both regional networks as well in initiatives that tend to support the further development of a local environment.



Figure 5: Coconat; source: coconat-space.com

Unlike the previous two discussed cases, Coconat organises and hosts various events mainly focused on smaller yet very different groups of individuals. These events are predominantly organised to cater to their users' needs and expectations who come for a more extended stay and base their work and social life on Coconat's location.

The key takeaways from Coconat are the following:

1. A more extensive and highly diverse site of a rural coworking space can consist of different areas for either leisure-based or work-related use. With individuals able to access all of these offers at the location, a rural coworking space can offer complete packages with included accommodation, 24/7 workspace, meals and sports activities, making it an optimal choice for users who seek the whole package;
2. A clearly defined strategy and a unique mission goal led to a strong and well-recognised brand;
3. Participation and initiation of several international and regional networks bring a higher chance of obtaining structural and investment funds.

PART II – Details of the actions envisaged

3 KEY ACTIONS

Action Plan is a document providing details on how the lessons learnt from the cooperation in OSS project will be implemented in order to improve the policy instrument that is addressing the problems within the region. It specifies the nature of the actions to be implemented, their timeframe, the players involved, the costs (if any), and funding sources (if any).

This Action Plan gives direct recommendations for measures that will significantly boost SMEs competitiveness, enhance business performance in the region and create a better investment environment. Regional policies will be targeted and accordingly support the dissemination of innovative solutions and new business models that would lead to productivity gains and provide access to new markets. The plan consists of detailed description of 2 key actions and guidance for their practical integration to the policy instrument addressed.

Focusing on the Slovenian region of Gorenjska is twofold. First, by drawing on a recognized best practice network that interlaces entrepreneurial ecosystems in Norway, this project conceptually develops a similar network to connect existing coworking centers in Gorenjska. Doing so ensures the further development of coworking hubs in the region. Second, by analyzing other rural coworking spaces, this project models an establishment of rural coworking hub in Gorenjska, which would attract both digital nomads and knowledge workers from the region.

3.1 Business Support Network

To ensure the successful development of such a network to interlace local ecosystems in the region of Gorenjska it is highly advantageous to look into solutions in other countries and regions with the intention of identifying best practices that may serve as a foundation for this project. With a foundation built, the approach can then be further contextualized by considering the conditions of the local ecosystems and aligning the solution with the needs and expectations of stakeholders in the region.

KEY ACTION 1 BUSINESS SUPPORT NETWORK	
CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL	The first key action has been identified as applicable and subsequently transferable due to analyzing the "Hoppid" system as a case of good and successful practice. Similarly, the action contextualized a developmental plan to establish a similar entrepreneurial system in the Gorenjska region, Slovenia. The region's capital, the city of Kranj, is the home of one of the most proactive coworking spaces in the country. Given its success as a coworking space and standing as a business incubator, building a network together with other local coworking spaces may significantly add to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and thus prove beneficial to the region of Gorenjska as a whole.
WHY IS THIS KEY ACTION NEEDED?	The presented action is needed due to the evolving understanding of the current entrepreneurial ecosystem in the region of Gorenjska. An efficient and robust exchange network can result in a higher engagement rate between local entrepreneurs, start-ups, policymakers, key players from the industry and other relevant organizations. The described network can support the further development of a local and subsequently the regional entrepreneurial ecosystem.

<p>KEY ACTION PROPOSAL</p>	<p>Therefore, the key action envisions a plan on building a network that would be similar to the systematic framework of the Hoppid network. First, it is vital to explore the local business environment analytically, which is generally already done by the Kovačnica coworking space regularly. Second, it is needed to identify the significant needs of local entrepreneurs and the entrepreneurial system. Third, it is essential to identify the key HR to have a starting base of needed advisors and mentors. Fourth, identifying core players and securing a buy-in with local contacts will result in a rich and efficient pool of the said advisors and mentors.</p> <p>Fifth, it will be essential to set up a centralized platform that will have the capacity to connect the identified entrepreneurs with the set pool of advisors and mentors. Sixth, it will be essential to carefully plan content creation tailored and based on the local needs. Seventh, an accompanying promotion and a bulletproof communication plan will effectively attract the key players from the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and retain them within the network. Finally, a subsequent expectation of the network could be possible by attracting additional industry players from other regions and urban areas that will have the capacity to further fuel the growth. Carefully planned steps will result in the action to succeed and the network to organically grow outside its planned borders.</p> <p>These steps can be partially adapted and possibly expanded, but the procedural steps should stay the same to ensure the quality and efficiency behind the network.</p>
<p>STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED</p>	<p>BSC Kranj, The Municipality of Kranj, Kovačnica Coworking</p>
<p>TIMEFRAME</p>	<p>2021 - 2023</p>
<p>COSTS</p>	<p>75 000 EUR for a pilot network scheme (initial cost assessment for the predicted piloting timeframe)</p>
<p>FUNDING</p>	<p>Program for the implementation of European cohesion policy within the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund plus for the period 2021-2027 in Slovenia</p>
<p>EXPECTED IMPACT</p>	<p>The expected impact will be the inclusion and exchange between the relevant entrepreneurs and their entities and various stakeholders. Based on a case study of the Hoppid system, it is anticipated that the network will result in a more efficient entrepreneurial network with a higher rate of possibilities, funds and knowledge openly available to relevant involved individuals and entities.</p>
<p>THE FUTURE STEPS</p>	<p>The future steps are two-folded. First, there should be continued efforts to expand the network of vital local figures in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to bring the network closer to its first launch gradually. Similarly, the involvement of these local key figures will help secure buy-in by residents, authorities, and other relevant stakeholders and help attract first individuals and small start-ups interested in the offer. In addition, refining the initial framework and prototype should be done in close collaboration with local entrepreneurs and the pool of future mentors and advisors. Moreover, the stakeholders should follow the relevant KPIs and measure the efficiency of the network.</p> <p>Second, there should be continued efforts to expand the network by including local industry players and creating interlinkages to entrepreneurial ecosystems in urban areas, for instance, through joint projects or events with relevant coworking spaces and other hubs. As identified in the key action's conceptual development steps, proactive and efficient communication</p>

	activities will be crucial here to attract a sufficient number of local entrepreneurs and spark the exchange processes within the network.
KPIs	<p>The predicted KPIs are the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of involved a) individual entrepreneurs and b) advisors/mentors 2. Proactivity of the involved individuals and the number of exchanged processes 3. The number of knowledge and/or support-based exchanges between individual entrepreneurs and advisors/mentors 4. Total number of subsequent funds 5. Results from active dissemination and promotion

3.2 Rural Coworking Space

In the past 15 years, coworking spaces have swiftly grown into a flourishing industry of some 19,000 worldwide (Statista, 2021). Home to more than five million users such as freelancers, solo-entrepreneurs, start-ups, and other knowledge workers, the underlying concept of coworking has matured into a crucial response to the changing nature of work. It has garnered further attention in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

As a result of such highly skilled individuals' co-location and the facilitated social interaction and co-constructed sense of community (among other factors), coworking spaces contribute significantly to local entrepreneurial ecosystems. Despite the ubiquity in primarily urban areas, during the past few years, the concept has extended to smaller cities and more rural areas as well, where first indications continue to confirm their positive effects on the local environment and its role as an enabler for local entrepreneurial activity.

With the first coworking spaces established in Slovenia's capital Ljubljana less than ten years ago, BSC Kranj quickly established the coworking space Kovačnica in the city of Kranj in the North-Western region of Gorenjska. Given its success as a coworking space and standing as a business incubator, building a network together with other local coworking spaces may significantly add to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and thus prove beneficial to the region of Gorenjska as a whole. To facilitate this process, this section will address relevant implementation steps for setting up an entrepreneurial support network of coworking spaces, other hubs, and stakeholders to enhance the local ecosystem to ensure a solid fit for the local conditions and needs.

Before delving deeper into developing a model for a rural coworking space, it is necessary to outline the theoretical underpinnings of the coworking model first. Coworking is a contemporary workplace phenomenon where unaffiliated professionals come together in shared workspaces under the ethos of "working alone, together" (Spinuzzi, 2012). As a result of the changing nature of work, the rise of the knowledge economy, and the ubiquity and accessibility of digital technologies, among others, coworking spaces have emerged as an essential response to these developments and have become an important aspect of urban social infrastructures (Merkel, 2015).

Coworking spaces allow these knowledge workers to circumvent feelings of social isolation which they might experience when working from home, but especially give them the chance to benefit from its functioning as a focal point and connect them with other individuals, resources and ideas (Waters-Lynch & Potts, 2017). In that regard, coworking spaces are organised as communities of work (Rus & Orel, 2015) in which their members co-construct a sense of community (Garrett et al., 2017). However, the intricate dynamics in coworking spaces require close attention to effectively nurture what Waters-Lynch and Duff (2021) coined the affective commons of coworking as a community-led project. As such, the community managers in coworking spaces take on a crucial role (Cabral & Winden, 2016) in that they identify the needs

of individuals and employ mediation techniques to foster community-building and trust among users who, in turn, benefit from the resulting advantageous conditions in the shared workspace (Orel & Alonso Almeida, 2019).

Coworking spaces are frequented by individuals and teams from strongly diverse backgrounds. Despite differences in terms of the primary target audience depending on the specific coworking, the member base commonly consists of freelancers and solo-entrepreneurs, early-stage entrepreneurs, as well as members of small start-ups and small business teams (Gandini, 2015). Fueled by the rise of remote working opportunities, digital nomads (Orel, 2019) have also turned to coworking spaces and constitute an important part of the target audience. Joining coworking spaces enables them to attain an ideal balance of leisure and work whilst settling for brief periods in different locations around the world.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, the dynamics of the coworking model and the industry's rapid growth were heavily disrupted, with coworking spaces hit hard by the related restrictions imposed by governments (Mayerhoffer, 2021) to contain the spread of the virus. Nevertheless, like with other crises (after all, the financial crisis of 2007/2008 has given rise to the concept of coworking in the first place, Merkel, 2015), the Covid-19 pandemic bears significant opportunities for coworking spaces (Ceinar & Mariotti, 2021) in shaping the future of work and re-kindling local economies. Similarly, the industry is expected to revert to its flourishing growth already shortly (coworkingresource.org, 2020).

Moreover, the pandemic has sparked a significant debate on the future of work concerning remote working opportunities. Popular media outlets such as Forbes highlight how this "Work-From-Home Experiment" (Johnson, 2020) has shifted attention to flexible work arrangements. Prominent players have swiftly followed suit in pioneering a more flexible, post-Covid-19 workplace. Spotify, a sizeable Swedish audio streaming and media services provider, announced in February 2021 that they would introduce a work-from-anywhere policy, giving employees the choice to choose their preferred working location, including the offer to pay for the employees' membership in a coworking space (Lundström & Westerdahl, 2021).

Such spikes in demand for coworking spaces may also hold significant opportunities for more peripheral areas. Despite their primary focus on urban areas, Mariotti et al. (2021) point out how the increasing numbers of remote workers in more rural areas gradually add to the attractiveness of rural coworking spaces. Such spaces may also speed up the recovery efforts from the pandemic by "[nurturing] knowledge diversity and entrepreneurial culture in the ecosystem" (Kuckertz et al., 2020, p. 6), given their positive effects on skills necessary for entrepreneurial success (Bouncken & Reuschl, 2018).

Based on the three observed cases, we can conceptualize a step-by-step guide that should be considered when planning and subsequently opening a rural coworking space on the selected site within the Gorenjska region. As underlined in the three good practice cases, it is vital to envision the development of a workplace that would show implicit and explicit results. For this purpose, we propose a functionalist approach with detailed planning ahead. As learned from the observed cases, it is crucial to not only carefully select the micro-location of the potential rural coworking system but also to identify relevant target groups, a building/place where the coworking space will be positioned, the accompanied contact and a well-thought-out financial plan that will result in a sustainable revenue stream.

However, while these elements could be identifiable with a certain amount of effort, specifying and subsequently understanding how to extract value may be challenging. The Nest seemingly managed to extract measurable value from their picked location in the Vratsa area. Still, it failed to make a breakthrough when trying to strategies on attracting foreigners that would boost the local economy. On the other hand, the rural coworking space in the Bansko area managed to curate a well-knit community of workers from various backgrounds whilst simultaneously creating a synergetic approach to merging their services with the local environment. Yet, they struggled with their selected worksite that lacked sufficient sunlight, ambience and capacity to meet their needs.

KEY ACTION 2		A RURAL COWORKING SPACE
CONTEXT OF THE PROPOSAL	<p>The second key action described in the following document evolves around the development of a rural coworking space. As discussed throughout the document, the coworking model predicts an open-plan or semi-open plan office environment frequented by individuals and teams from strongly diverse backgrounds. Despite differences in terms of the primary target audience depending on the specific coworking, the member base commonly consists of freelancers and solo entrepreneurs, early-stage entrepreneurs, and members of small start-ups and small business teams. As it could be observed from the case of Kovačnica, joining coworking spaces enables users to attain an ideal balance of leisure and work whilst moving settling for brief periods in different locations around the world.</p> <p>The second key action envisions setting a coworking space within the context of a rural environment. A rural coworking space could assist the localized entrepreneurial ecosystems by actively helping local stakeholders and facilitating networking. Whereas urban coworking spaces target knowledge workers and other members of the (local) creative workforce and the freelancers, entrepreneurs and start-ups, the target audience of rural coworking spaces differs. Having said that, it is vital to pay close attention to the local environment to tailor the offering of the rural coworking spaces to their unique circumstances.</p>	
WHY IS THIS KEY ACTION NEEDED?	<p>A rural coworking space can – if done correctly – aid and further accelerate the development of a local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Moreover, it generally attracts highly skilled remote working individuals that contribute to the said entrepreneurial ecosystem and positively shape the local environment (e.g., spending, investing, etc.) and rural communities.</p>	
KEY ACTION PROPOSAL	<p>According to investigating The Nest coworking space from a rural Bulgarian region and other good practice cases, it is vital to plan setting up a rural coworking environment systematically. First, setting up the said coworking space in a relatively undeveloped peripheral area can serve as means to empower local knowledge workers and interconnect them into an active collaborative community. Second, the strategic planning and organisation of events that a) support knowledge transfer and b) attract various interest groups of individuals and enable them to connect. Third, seeking financial sources through crowdsourcing techniques supports identifying and branding a rural coworking environment as a community-orientated workplace.</p> <p>Fourth, it is vital to make the local environment a part of a coworking space's identity and subsequent branding. Doing so commonly results in a symbiotic relationship with locals and existing infrastructure. Fifth, adapting the strategy to attract digital nomads from various backgrounds results in a more robust, well-knitted community that tends to share knowledge and shows a higher tendency towards collaborative activities, all whilst promoting openness and diversity. Finally, participation and initiation of several international and regional networks increase the chance of obtaining structural and investment funds.</p>	
STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED	<p>BSC Kranj, the selected local Slovenian municipality (e.g., Kranjska Gora, etc.), local entrepreneurial ecosystem and relevant organizations based on it.</p>	
TIMEFRAME	<p>2021 - 2025</p>	

COSTS	100 000 EUR for a pilot rural coworking space (predicted starting cost for the expected timeframe)
FUNDING	Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU cohesion Policy 2014-2020; Investment under CLLD strategies – CLLD project
EXPECTED IMPACT	The main expected impact is the empowerment of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem, with the second identified result being the promotion of a local environment and involved stakeholders from the local leisure, gastronomical or/and other relevant industries.
THE FUTURE STEPS	The future steps involve a) securing sufficient funding streams to keep the rural coworking space operational, b) prolonged plan for active community mediation and facilitation programs, and c) expanding the operations of a selected rural coworking space with the possibility to opening additional locations in other rural areas.
KPIs	The predicted KPIs are the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Number of rural coworking space users 2. The structure of the user base (e.g., regular users, temporary users, individuals, teams) 3. Efficiency of facilitation/mediation mechanisms and the turnaround number of attendances 4. Measurable, collaborative processes between the users

PART III – Policy context

4 POLICY CONTEXT

Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:	<input type="checkbox"/> Investment for Growth and Jobs programme <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> European Territorial Cooperation programme <input type="checkbox"/> Other regional development policy instrument
Name of the policy instrument addressed:	Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU cohesion Policy 2014-2020

One of the main goals of OSS project and this Action Plan is to affect initially identified policy instrument Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU cohesion Policy 2014-2020 and 2021-2027.

BSC Kranj presents in this Action Plan two key measures to promote SME's competitiveness and promote the creation and operation of new firms, especially start-ups. The Action Plan was developed under OSS project, cofounded by Interreg Europe programme.

The targeted policy instrument in Application Form was:

Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU cohesion Policy 2014-2020

Priority axis 9: Social inclusion and poverty reduction

Thematic objective 5: Investment under CLLD strategies

Specific objective 1: Improved economic and social inclusion in areas of local action groups

In which they targeted "CLLD strategies will address development challenges, such as persistently high unemployment rates and job shortage. Deterioration of conditions in these areas is also due to the lack of entrepreneurial drive and initiatives and the low level of innovation which is coupled by the underdeveloped support environment. Only a limited number of enterprises boast innovation potential and as such represent the potential generator of growth and local development. Most of the enterprises are only in the initial stage of development and are not able to reach the planned business indicators." (OP 2014-2020)

During the implementation of the OSS project, we have identified another policy instrument which is more important to influence it with OSS findings and actions: Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU cohesion Policy 2021-2027. It is the successor to the aforementioned OP and will influence the implementation of activities and projects in the near future.

The targeted policy instrument in OP 2021-2027 is:

Program for the implementation of European cohesion policy within the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund plus for the period 2021-2027 in Slovenia (successor to the 2014-2021 operational program, we will use OP 2021-2027 from now).

Priority axis 1 (CP 1): A smarter Europe by promoting innovative and smart economic transformation

Specific objective 1.2: Improving the growth and competitiveness of SMEs and job creation in SMEs

In the draft OP 2021-2027 following activities are planned for implementation within the policy instrument that are directly linked with OSS project:

- Development and optimization of the ecosystem to support entrepreneurship and innovation,
- Transition of new entrepreneurs and start-ups to a faster growth phase (start-ups and companies in the transition to the next growth phase) and for fast-growing companies for (scale-up companies),
- Growth and development of companies, process improvements in companies, introduction of new business models and business excellence in companies,
- Internationalization and cooperation in the field of macro-regions through the formation of partnerships with companies in foreign markets, promotion and strengthening of brands of products and services of Slovenian companies abroad and joint investments in foreign markets.

Within the specific objective, it is envisaged to address urban development with the help of territorial approaches, insofar as the needs arising from the prepared territorial strategies are demonstrated.

Why it should be improved:

Despite the fact that the both documents address the actions set out in this Action Plan, the development of support services should go in the direction of upgrading a supportive and innovative environment for competitive entrepreneurship through comprehensive smart public services for businesses - promoting entrepreneurship among young people and helping them entrepreneurial pathways. Plus, they should encourage the creation of innovative companies with high added value.

In addition, the draft document only mentions companies subject to innovative environments: university and business incubators, technology parks, accelerators, co-working spaces, learning laboratories, etc., while decentralized support communities and activities for entrepreneurs play a key role in improving start-ups and the realization of the development potentials of companies and competitiveness at home or foreign markets. All this contributed to the reduction of the mortality rate of companies in the initial period of operation.

Even though draft OP 2021-2027 targets problem with a lack of entrepreneurial initiative and lower rate of start-ups, there is a need to upgrade the planned mechanisms of the OP in the way that would really meet the challenges of target groups. Especially we see, that traditional measures are not fitting the startups (especially young) needs which are lacking innovative services, innovative measures, lack of access to finances, lack of access to modern technologies (including ICT services).

How to improve policies:

Through new project and by implementation of pilot projects with the possibility of transferring good practice to other cities in the region. Our goal is to find better and more effective solutions to support potential entrepreneurs and SME's.

By improved communication and collaboration of key players and stakeholders in the ecosystem for startups.

By direct influence on draft OP 2021 – 2027. As a Regional Development Agency, part of Economic Interest Groupings (EIG) of RDA's we have open direct communications channels with ministries (especially with Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and Government Office for Development and European Cohesion Policy), regular communication with municipalities and mayors for putting pressure on improving national policies and regional stakeholders (NGO's, entrepreneurs, youth ...).

Endorsement:

Key action 1: Business support network

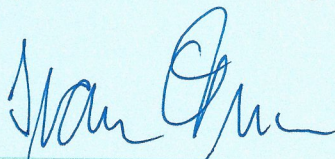
Key action 2: Rural coworking space

I declared that the content of this Action Plan is validated and approved

Date: 6. 10. 2022

Name: dr. Ivan Šmon, President of Development Council of Gorenjska Region (Predsednik Razvojnega sveta Gorenjske regije)

Signature:



Stamp of the organization (if available): /