

Interreg
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Report on Innovation Support Measures

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Report on Innovation Support Measures

Introduction

The purpose with WP4 Innovation Support Measures is to increase cluster capacity in the North Sea Region. Strong clusters with effective tools to improve SME's innovation skills are crucial to meet global competition. Improved knowledge and information of cluster needs, tools and best practise for regional innovation support measures have been exchanged transnationally, both between project partners and externally. By forming a benchmark for cluster organisations to adapt enables them to align and enhance their services.

Activities entail identification of innovation support measures that exist in the regions; specified per renewable energy technology (RET) value chain, covering each step of the innovation chain (TRL 5-9). This has led to an in-depth understanding of the exact working of Regional Innovation Systems for each region and identified bottlenecks in the innovation systems. It has also improved the understanding of how to effectively organize interregional innovation activities for SMEs around existing and improved/aligned support measures already tied into regional RET value and innovation chains.

In WP4 tools have been defined to become applicable in a transnational context and have become the foundation for a shared toolbox. The model for synergetic interregional cooperation, where SMEs can profit from innovation and business opportunities through the alignment of interregional innovation and value chains is unique. It will contribute significantly to existing projects and initiatives like Enterprise Europe Network and European Cluster of Excellence Initiative.

The main deliverables:

- A standard working model to improve cluster activities with support of innovation measures
- A comprehensive work flow to communicate to companies and other partners locally and internationally
- A toolbox to disseminate within the city organisation and among regional partners

Innovation measures will become part of the service portfolio of clusters. Deliverables will be incorporated in services to SMEs, and become part of the clusters long-term strategy and work plans.

Toolbox

The Toolbox is aimed towards experienced matchmakers as well as someone planning their first matchmaking event, initiating and facilitating innovative collaborations among SMEs and the public sector through the Living Lab Event concept developed in the Northern Connections.

The process when developing the toolbox has consisted of initial workshops with the partners in the project where tools used in different contexts in the various organisations were compiled and discussed. The workshops took place physically at the second Transnational Working Days in Aalborg June 2017 as well as online work and contribution by engaged partners. The result from the workshops was a large number of tools, all being published in Podio, the project's CRM system. This made it possible for the project partners to evaluate and comment on each tool in continuation to the workshop(s). The first version of the Toolbox solely focused on the tools themselves, dividing them into four areas: events, services, long term initiatives and tools. Already in this part of the process the goal was to link the tools to the actual activities taking place in the project. At the Transnational Working Days in Kiel December 2017 the Toolbox version 1.0 was presented and received feedback from the partners and for final review.

The first two Living Labs in the project where we actually had the possibility to test and validate the tools ourselves took place in Esbjerg (DK) and Oslo (NO), in November 2018. This is where the journey to develop the Toolbox version 2.0 commenced. The goal was to test each tool in the Living Lab process, which has been done successfully. The following Living Lab took place in Gothenburg (SE) in May 2019 and after that the decision was made to finalize and print the Toolbox version 2.0, to be able to present and receive feedback on it from the project partners at the Transnational Working Days in Hamburg in June. The tools now compiled in the Toolbox version 2.0 were only the ones utilised in the first Living Labs where the actual functionality had been verified.

In the first part of the Toolbox 2.0 the individual tools are described, followed by a description of on how these were utilised through the coordination process; before, during and after the two Living Lab Events held in Esbjerg (DK) and Gothenburg (SE). The descriptions focus on the thematic challenges defined by the Living Lab owners, in collaboration with local cluster representatives from the Northern Connections partnership.



<https://northsearegion.eu/media/10022/toolbox-20-final-version-pdf.pdf>

The format, design and content have been supported by the project partners which has resulted in a third and final version where all Living Labs will be presented through a short description along with the tools used in each occasion. This way we can verify the effect of each tool since a majority of them have been tested at various occasions.

Why tools for the matchmaking process

The toolbox offers a collection of practical tools to be used when planning and conducting matchmaking events, where Northern Connections are aiming at unlocking the potential for transregional and transnational collaboration and extended innovation and business opportunities. By using the different tools, the potential for an actual success in the matchmaking process is greatly enhanced.

All involved stakeholders as companies - SME's and larger enterprises - and knowledge institutions should benefit from participating, and they must be able to see the immediate value of the input.

The tools collected in the toolbox are supposed to be a support in creating the right framework and combine structure with creativity and give the matchmaking a multifaceted approach. Matchmaking can at one point be between buyer and supplier but also in identifying areas of collaboration between stakeholders within the same area of interest.

Having tried out all the tools presented at various events arranged within the project, the experience of how the different tools work and how to optimise the outcome is well documented. Often success depends on a combination of the different tools and the dedication of the matchmakers.

The tools are not unique in any way and probably used at many occasions without being named as a specific tool. By packaging the activities as tools with an easy to understand description it will contribute to future matchmakers and event planners in their planning process, helping them to more actively and in a more consistent manner strive towards a successful matchmaking event.

Some of the tools invite/initiate a mandatory follow up. What actually happened after the *Innovator matchmaking workshop*? Did the participants continue the dialogue and make the contacts they committed themselves to? This gives the matchmakers the possibility to prolong the dialogue with the potential of a higher hit rate. By following up on whether your participants met potential partners or/and whether they need further matchmaking efforts or follow-up meetings to get the collaboration started you will find out whether a match has been made and whether it can become a success story. Such success can help to emphasise the difference that your network can make.

Experience of the tools from the project

During the process of the Living Labs all partners have had the possibility to test the different tools and have in retrospect given some short statements on their experience.

Tom Mikus, EEHH:

"The combination of pitches and one-to-one meetings with the challenge owners has proven to be very successful. During the pitches, the solution providers had the chance to introduce themselves not only to the challenge owners, but also to all other participants of the Living Lab. Like this, the matchmaking for the solution providers beyond the challenge owners was facilitated."

“The Podio platform has helped me a lot to organise the registration and selection process of the innovators in the background. But in retrospect, I think b2match would be the tool of choice, since it is transparent for the participants and meetings can be scheduled among all participants, which is perfect for a matchmaking event such as the Living Labs.”

Waronne Sint, Development Agency Noord-Holland Noord NV:

“It was the first time I worked with the B2Match tool. And although the possibilities of the tool seem endless, it is still user-friendly. As an organizer, it takes time and attention to set it up properly. For entrepreneurs it is a simple tool to use. You have to encourage everyone to fill in their profile as completely as possible. Once that is done, the tool does its job, good suggestions for matches are made and the actual matchmaking on the day itself runs smoothly.”

Jannes Kalfsbeek, New Energy Coalition:

“The B2match tool has been the perfect instrument to plan and organise the Living Lab event in Alkmaar. The tool is specifically designed to organise 1-on-1 meetings, however in our case it has also been very useful to apply the Living Lab event concept. All information regarding the event and communications can be provided in one central spot; i.e. the dedicated website. It also helped us to keep an overview of registrations per individual part in the programme (workshops, guided tours, site-visit, matchmaking sessions etc.) and organising individual meetings between both challenge owners and solution providers as well as between all other participants.”

Stefanie de Smets, Cleantech Flanders:

“The one-on-one meetings are the core the Living Lab. It is nice challenge owners are able to have an in-depth conversation with several innovators on just 1 day, making a very efficient way to develop new collaborations. The plenary sessions with keynote speeches and pitches on stage are an added bonus, especially for the innovators. It gives them extra opportunities to network and be inspired. In this way, not only the challenge owners have multiple constructive meetings, but also for the innovators extra meetings are created.”

Carina Nowak, Business Region Göteborg

“The Innovator matchmaking workshop was a very positive experience where a mix of solution providers were put together in small workshops to identify potential collaboration between each other. Many of the participants could identify a number of opportunities which they hadn't perceived would be possible. This enabled the solution providers, in many cases SME's, to find new partners, suppliers or maybe even buyers.”

These statements give a good view on how these innovation support measures largely have contributed to the success of the project.

Cluster Manager Training

Two of the main deliverables for WP4 are covered by the Cluster Manager Training:

- A standard working model to improve cluster activities with support of innovation measures
- A comprehensive work flow to communicate to companies and other partners locally and internationally

By dividing the Cluster Manager Training into two separate two-day sessions, the training made it possible to quite extensively cover cluster theory as well as practise. The first occasion took place in October 2018 and reached around 25 participants, mainly partners from Northern Connections. The second occasion took place in November 2019 where we also reached around 25 participants.

The content for the first occasion was designed to focus on cluster theories and how they specifically tie into the Northern Connections project. Professor Örjan Sölvell covered areas as cluster theory, internationalization and cross-clustering together with a deep dive into the 7 Gap Model. For cluster actors it was an opportunity to both get an overview of cluster theories and how that can be put to practise. The Toolbox of Innovation Support Measures was made use of, and discussions regarding what experience different partners have had, what works and what doesn't took place.

At the second training occasion cluster policy frameworks were covered including the evolution of cluster policy over time and the latest trends, together with discussing the logics for cluster policy and different types of cluster programmes. Next session went through value based cluster development and how to deliver value. The final part focused on internationalization and in what role clusters initiatives play. The two days were characterized by group discussions and sharing of success, as well as not so successful, stories.

The leaders of the two training occasions are all internationally well known and have extensive experience in both the theoretical and the practical fields of cluster work.

Örjan Sölvell is reknown for his research and initiatives within cluster strategy and competitiveness. He founded Center for Strategy and Competitiveness at Stockholm School of Economics and is Senior Institute Associate at Harvards Business School – Institute for Strategy and Competitiveness.

Emily Wise has conducted international benchmarking studies and other analyses, supported the development of (regional, programme, or monitoring) strategies, and facilitated transnational policy learning processes in the field of innovation and cluster development since 2003. More recently, Emily has been involved in providing research and advisory support on monitoring and evaluation of cluster programmes, governance and implementation of smart specialization and industrial transition strategies, internationalization and interregional collaboration. Emily is a member of TCI's Board of Directors, a trainer for the European Foundation for Cluster Excellence, and an ESCA Gold and Silver label expert.

Mats Williams has been working for many years with cluster development, smart specialisation, innovation processes both on a local, regional, national and international level. Initiated and lead the development of the cluster organisation Paper Province. In conjunction with Paper Province, a testbed for packaging material was developed.

The main feedback received from both occasions is that there is great difference in approach for clusters and the training has given a common understanding on the different areas gone through during the training together with the importance of sharing own examples and learning from each other.

Knowledge Transfer Workshop

The Knowledge Transfer Workshop is aiming at sharing best practise, together with other projects, related to growth and innovation activities in the North Sea Region

By showing results and lessons learned across different projects, sectors and actors that try to enable transnational SME collaboration we will enable the creation of synergy between activities and strengthen and expand knowledge.

Three questions were the foundation for the workshop:

- How does your project contribute to transregional and international collaboration? What methods do you use? What cases do you have?
- How can you see your project take up collaborations with the other projects?
- How do we ensure that we can maintain the pace after an event and furthermore how can we document our outputs from innovation activities and matchmaking?

Before the workshop there were three main outputs expected to gain from the session.

- Joint summary on transregional and international collaboration and innovation opportunities
- Recommendation on support measures to be developed/maintained
- Integration and alignment of activities across the North Sea Region that ensures synergy and knowledge transfer

The main takeaways from the exercise were:

- Who are the brokers of trust when it comes to successful projects? The discussions points to several actors in this field:
 - Regional Agencies on a policy level
 - Clusters on the SME level
 - Private sector actors themselves
- We should try to create a practitioner network across the different North Sea Projects. A network that is working and meeting to learn from each other – not to disseminate their own results and ignoring others.
- It would be fruitful to investigate how we can from individual (personal) bridging to collective trust building. How can we ensure that the trust that has been build over years between two or more organisations does not disappear when key persons leaves their organisation?
- A methodology for tracking by products would be more than welcome – perhaps a dedicated project on this subject.
- “You can bring the horses to the water, but you can’t make them drink”