

2024-11-19 Workshop WP 1:1**Output 1.1 – Co-created evaluation solutions with actions for organisational uptake**

Programme Output Indicator: **RCO116_3.1 – Jointly developed solution 1**

Learning Session on Regional Context: What does it look like in the three regions involved in the project from Sweden, Finland, and Ireland with focus on innovation ecosystems

**Report on the Learnings from the Workshop: Western Ireland, Savonia Finland, and Västerbotten Sweden****Introduction**

This report summarizes the key learnings from the recent workshop involving stakeholders from Western Ireland, Savonia in Finland, and Västerbotten in Sweden. The primary objective of the workshop was to understand the regional contexts of each partner with innovation ecosystem in focus, and explore the roles of stakeholders, and analyze the strategy development lifecycles within each region. By engaging with partners and stakeholders through discussions and evidence analysis before this partner workshop, the workshop aimed to foster collaboration and share best practices to create a baseline. This initiative is a crucial part of the ASTRIC project, which focuses on addressing regional

innovation challenges. More information can be found at <https://www.interreg-npa.eu/projects/astric>

Context of Each Partner Region

Western Ireland

Western Ireland is characterized by its rich cultural heritage, natural resources, and a growing emphasis on innovation, particularly in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, medical technology, and agri-food. The region faces challenges related to population retention, economic disparities, and infrastructure development. Key stakeholders include local government bodies, educational institutions, and industry representatives, all of whom play vital roles in shaping the region's economic landscape.

Savonia, Finland

Savonia is a diverse region known for its strong emphasis on education, research, and innovation. The presence of universities and research institutions fosters a vibrant ecosystem for startups and established companies alike. Savonia's strategy development focuses on leveraging its strengths in technology, health sciences, and sustainable practices. Stakeholders in this region include educational institutions, government agencies, and private sector players, all collaborating to enhance regional development.

Västerbotten, Sweden

Västerbotten is notable for its vast natural resources, including forestry and mining, which significantly contribute to its economy. The region has a strong focus on innovation in life sciences and digitalization, supported by institutions like Umeå University. However, Västerbotten faces challenges related to population aging and the need for sustainable development. Stakeholders include local governments, industry leaders, and research organizations, all working together to address these challenges.



Key Insights into Regional Innovation Context

Stakeholder Engagement

Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for the success of regional innovation strategies. Each region has identified key stakeholders who play significant roles in their respective innovation ecosystems. These include:

- **Local Governments:** Responsible for policy-making and funding initiatives that support regional development.
- **Educational Institutions:** Provide research, training, and innovation support, fostering a skilled workforce.
- **Industry Representatives:** Offer insights into market needs and trends, driving collaboration between academia and business.
- **Research Organizations:** Conduct studies and provide data that inform policy and strategy development.

Collaborative Approaches

The workshop participants emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders, to get them all to 'talk to each other'. By sharing knowledge and resources, regions can enhance their innovation capabilities. For instance, quarterly meetings initiated during the pandemic in Västerbotten, allowed stakeholders to discuss pressing issues and

explore collaborative opportunities. This approach has proven effective in breaking down silos and fostering a culture of cooperation and Västerbotten has kept these meetings also after the pandemic.

Strategy Development Lifecycles

Understanding Regional Contexts

Each region has developed its strategy development lifecycle, which reflects its unique context and challenges. Key elements include:

- **Assessment of Strengths and Weaknesses:** Regions must evaluate their existing capabilities and identify areas for improvement.
- **Setting Clear Objectives:** Defining specific goals helps guide the strategic planning process.
- **Engagement with Stakeholders:** Involving stakeholders at every stage ensures that strategies are relevant and actionable.
- **Implementation and Evaluation:** Regular monitoring and evaluation of strategies allow for adjustments and improvements over time.

Different Approaches to Strategy Development

The workshop highlighted that the regions had a lot in common, but may adopt different approaches to strategy development based on some specific needs. For example:

- **Western Ireland:** Focuses on leveraging its strengths in pharmaceuticals and medical technology while addressing challenges in population retention.
- **Savonia:** Emphasizes education and research as drivers of innovation, with a strong focus on sustainable practices.
- **Västerbotten:** Aims to balance its natural resource-based economy so the region not only foster the idea to be the supplier only on natural resources, but also the need for innovation in life sciences and digitalization/creative industry that needs the University and a lot of research also but are knowledge-based economy drivers.

Sharing Best Practices

Learning from Each Other

One of the primary goals of the workshop was to facilitate the sharing of best practices among the regions. Participants discussed successful initiatives and strategies that could be adapted to their own contexts. For example:

- **Digital Transformation:** All regions recognized the importance of digitalization in enhancing their innovation ecosystems. Sharing experiences related to digital tools

and platforms can help streamline processes and improve stakeholder engagement.

- **Focus on Youth Engagement:** Strategies to attract and retain young talent were discussed, with an emphasis on creating vibrant communities that appeal to younger demographics.

Identifying Common Challenges

The workshop also provided an opportunity to identify common challenges faced by the regions. These include:

- **Population Retention:** All regions are grappling with issues related to population aging and the outmigration of young people.
- **Resource Allocation:** Ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to support innovation and development is a shared concern.
- **Collaboration Across Borders:** The need for cross-regional collaboration was emphasized, with participants recognizing that no single region can address all challenges independently.

Commitment to Green and Just Transition

The regions share strong similarities as well as complementary differences, particularly in their commitment to achieving a green and just transition. It is essential to map the green and just transition needs and activities of each region, especially for key actors like policymakers and Higher Education and Research Institutions (HERIs). This mapping helps prioritize the most impactful and feasible needs to respond to and the correlating activities.

Conclusion

The workshop involving Western Ireland, Savonia, and Västerbotten has provided valuable insights into the contexts, stakeholder roles, and strategy development lifecycles of each region. By fostering collaboration and sharing best practices, the regions can enhance their innovation ecosystems and address common challenges.

Moving forward, it is essential for the regions to continue engaging with stakeholders, leveraging their strengths, and adapting their strategies to meet evolving needs. The commitment to collaboration and knowledge sharing will be crucial in building resilient and innovative communities that can thrive in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

Recommendations

1. **Enhance Stakeholder Engagement:** Continue to foster collaboration among stakeholders through regular meetings and workshops.

2. **Focus on Youth Retention:** Develop strategies to attract and retain young talent in all regions.
3. **Leverage Digital Tools:** Invest in digital platforms that facilitate communication and collaboration among stakeholders.
4. **Share Best Practices:** Establish a framework for ongoing knowledge sharing among the regions to promote continuous learning and improvement.
5. **Monitor and Evaluate Strategies:** Implement regular assessments of regional strategies to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

By implementing these recommendations, Western Ireland, Savonia, and Västerbotten can strengthen their innovation ecosystems and work towards a more sustainable and prosperous future.

Final Thoughts

The discussions during the workshop highlighted the importance of not only focusing on specific areas of strength but also fostering a broader range of ideas and innovations. As Västerbotten noted, while it is essential to excel in certain fields, the region must also be open to collaboration and learning from others. The analogy of successful NHL hockey players from small communities in Sweden, Finland and Canada illustrates that even regions with limited populations can produce significant talent and innovation when they foster the right environment.

In conclusion, the collaborative efforts of Western Ireland, Savonia, and Västerbotten can lead to the creation of a "super ecosystem" that leverages the strengths of each region. By working together, these regions can enhance their innovation capabilities and ensure a sustainable future for their communities.

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