



Northern Periphery and Arctic

OUTPUT 3.1

BSOs, Clusters, and HEI Jointly Piloting New Approaches to Supporting SMEs

RCO84_1.3: Pilot actions developed jointly and implemented in projects

Tested and trusted by the partnership of:



Joint Development

This action was jointly developed and delivered across four partner countries, with each pilot building on the lessons of the previous one. The sequential structure allowed partners to refine methods in real time, ensuring that the final approach was not theoretical but grounded in what actually worked for SMEs and advisors across diverse contexts.

Purpose

The WP3 pilot actions tested whether robust, research-backed methods for supporting business success could be translated into a practitioner-ready process that works across sectors, regions, and types of SMEs. The aim was to streamline and improve the methodology by learning from what worked well in each country.

Target Area / Community

The pilots targeted two groups simultaneously:

- **SMEs**, who benefited directly.
- **Business Support Organisations (BSOs)**, who could learn from the running of the pilot actions.

Stakeholder Needs

SMEs consistently need more effective, actionable support that improves their decision-making and increases their likelihood of success. BSOs, in turn, need practical methods they can implement without excessive customisation or complexity to increase entrepreneurial success. The pilots were designed to meet both needs.

What Was Being Tested

Across five sequential pilots in Finland, Ireland, Iceland, and Norway, the project tested:

- Whether large-scale entrepreneurship research could be operationalised into daily advisory practice.
- How three core approaches, **Milestone Mapping**, **Structured Validation**, and **Proactive Implementation**, perform with real SMEs.
- How the methods could be adapted across national contexts while maintaining their effectiveness.

The overarching question was whether a single, structured process could reliably guide diverse SMEs in different countries without diluting quality or requiring bespoke redesigns.

Methodology

Each pilot was run by MTU partnered with each partner in each country and they all applied the same underlying structure:

1. **Milestone Map:** SMEs defined clear goals, worked backwards to identify critical milestones, and visualised causal relationships and assumptions.
2. **Structured Validation:** Key assumptions were systematically tested using appropriate methods (interviews, pilots), improving decision quality beyond typical Lean Start-Up practices.

The delivery format evolved significantly, early pilots relied on testing and streamlining content. Later pilots shifted to a collaborative **MIRO board**, which proved far more effective: it gave SMEs shared visibility, enabled peer learning, clarified next steps, and created a sense of progress and accountability.

Timing of Pilots

Country	Start	End
Finland	07/09/2023	03/11/2023
Ireland	23/01/2024	06/03/2024
Finland	14/03/2024	29/05/2024
Iceland	18/09/2024	23/10/2024
Norway	22/01/2025	01/05/2025

Progression Across Pilots

The progression was incremental and cumulative:

- **Pilot 1 (Finland)** used materials from the SSDM bridging project.
- **Pilot 2 (Ireland)** incorporated newly published research and streamlined methods, diverging from Finland's version.
- **Pilot 3 (Finland)** reapplied with the updated Irish methods.
- **Pilot 4 (Iceland)** implemented the Irish version with minimal changes.
- **Pilot 5 (Norway)** adapted the Icelandic version, blending about 80% of the shared methodology with around 20% of Norway's existing programme.

The final pilot also marked the full transition to MIRO, which significantly improved clarity, engagement, and peer interaction.

Outcome and Conclusions

All pilots were successful and well received by participants and stakeholders. The sequential, iterative approach produced marked improvements in format, delivery, and usability, culminating in a robust, validated programme tested across the NPA. The pilots also demonstrated that advisors can reliably guide diverse SMEs using a single structured process, that visual milestone mapping strengthens strategic reasoning, and that more rigorous validation leads to better decision-making with fewer wasted resources.

The final [*Strategic Clarity*](#) handbook synthesises all lessons learned and is now available as a practical guide for BSOs.