

SOCENT SPAs

Interreg Europe

SOCENT SPAs improves the effectiveness of regional policies in sparsely populated areas to actively support social economy and social entrepreneurs as a driver to regional competitiveness and inclusive growth

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SME
competitiveness



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund

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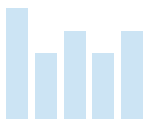
What SocentSPAs is?

SOCENT SPAs is fostering interregional cooperation among six public/private entities of Finland, Germany, Slovakia and Spain in a view to improve the effectiveness of regional policies in actively supporting the visibility, incubation and acceleration of social entrepreneurs in sparsely populated areas (SPAs) as a driver to regional competitiveness and inclusive growth.

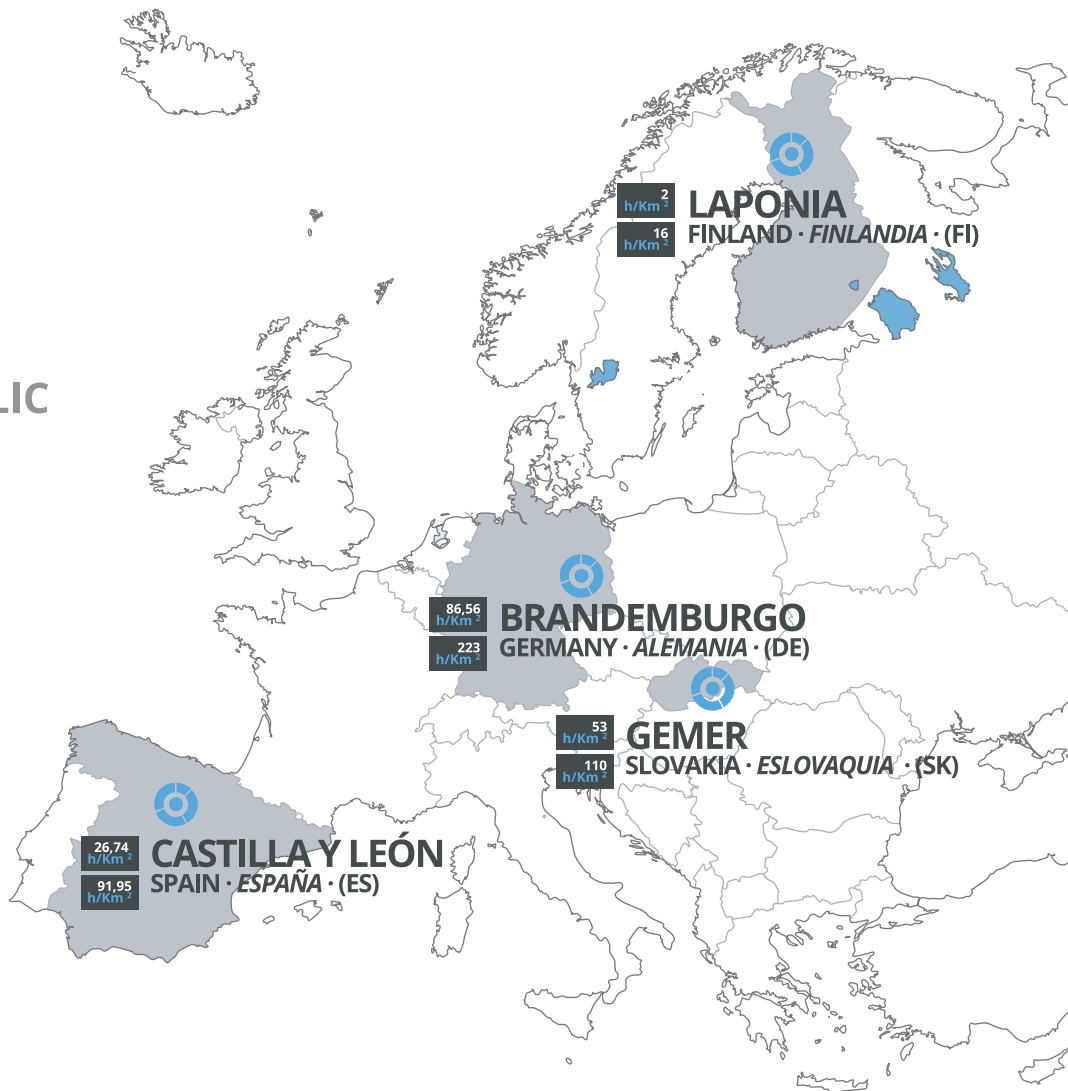
A particular challenge

In SPAs, demographic trends are a particular challenge. As counter-measure, social innovation needs to be developed to promote employment and competitiveness as it can make a real difference as a source of innovative approaches for resolving societal challenges through mobilizing civil society to further inclusive socioeconomic development. Social Enterprises (SEs) directly benefit local development and correct major socioeconomic imbalances while benefiting local communities, a crucial asset to secure the population in SPAs. However, bespoke support for SEs is limited; policymakers can play a significant role by setting up the right legal framework.

DEUTSCHLAND
SLOVAK REPUBLIC
SPAIN
FINLAND



TOPIC
SME competitiveness



Interregional exchange of knowledge

Thus, to influence policies in a view to enhance SEs' visibility and competitiveness whilst taking into account SPAs' conditions, interregional exchange of knowledge and successful experiences/good practices are fundamental. With an integrated approach, a comprehensive learning process based on identification, analysis and transfer will be implemented through workshops, site visits and meetings with stakeholders. Based on the learning acquired, action plans aiming at integrating SEs in SPAs support schemes into policies will be developed. Communication will play a crucial role in supporting the action.

Four implemented action plans

The main outputs will be a best practices guide for SEs in SPAs and 4 implemented action plans to promote the SEs in SPAs. The main results is being policymakers' awareness raised on SEs as a driver to inclusive growth and their capacities increased in identifying SEs' needs and addressing these adequately in their policies to create an enabling legal environment for SEs.



What have we done in 2017?

Kick-off meeting

Our project celebrated on January its kick-off meeting. This happened in Soria, a small province of Castile and Leon region. Soria is the most unpopulated province in Spain, with a population density of less than 9 inhabitants per square kilometre. At the meeting there were present the four teams that would pilot our project: Brandenburg, Gemer (Slovakia), Lapland and Castile and Leon. What unites us is the demographic problem that, to a greater or lesser extent, we all suffer. And of course the desire to contribute to its solution.

During two days of hard work in our headquarters El Hueco, although also of good food and some tourist visit, we review the activities of the next months. We also take the opportunity to present this in society and for this we convened a press conference that was very successful.



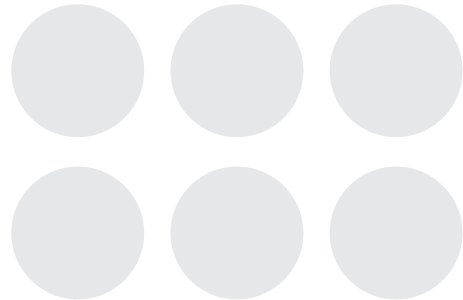


Visiting Gemer region

The Slovak team was the first to host the representatives from partnering organisations and institutions from Finland, Germany and Spain of the Project Social Entrepreneurship in Sparsely Populated Areas (SocentSPAs).

Two-days long visit through the region of Gemer-Malohonty was rich in programme and meetings with local stakeholders.

There was a lot to share and discuss about the current living conditions of the local people, challenging regional problems and opportunities for the future development.



Visiting Castile and Leon

On May 9 and 10 the team met in Soria, Castilla y León, Spain. For two days we visited the main social enterprises of El Hueco, such as La Exclusiva, Huertos de Soria, Megara, Föra or Celtiberian Ring, and visited some towns in the province, such as Gómara, Burgo de Osma, Almarza, La Póveda or Magaña. This town won a contest whose prize was a year of free internet via satellite.

The autonomous community of Castile and Leon is the largest Spanish region with an occupancy area of 94,227 square kilometers, approximately 19% of the national territory. It comprises nine provinces: Ávila, Burgos, Leon, Palencia, Salamanca, Segovia, Soria, Valladolid and Zamora. In turn, it contained 2,248 municipalities, 28% of the national total.

Its population is 2,447,519 inhabitants, which represents roughly 5% of the national total. As a result, the population density in Castile and Leon is much lower than the Spanish average (26 and 92 inhabitants per km², respectively).





Visiting Lapland

The second interregional visit took us to Finnish Lapland and was held on May 23 and 24. These are the lessons we learned. Lessons learned: The Finnish welfare state is taking on many functions that are or could be carried out by social enterprises in Spain and Slovakia. The Finnish health care system is rather complex with different public bodies covering different forms of treatment, rehabilitation, etc. So far, the Finnish Social Enterprise Mark has not been widely used in the



operations of Lapin Kuntoutus, as their head of services presenting the organization to us, could not give us any information on the mark and its benefits.

The municipality of Sodankylä seems to be a forerunner in developing solutions for regional development and social sustainability, with initiatives such as using mostly local/regional ingredients in their central kitchen and the Sompion Tähti cooperative providing services to the elderly living at home in outlying villages, enabling them to stay independently within their known environment for as long possible.

Visiting Brandenburg

On 08 June 2017 the members of the SOCENT SPAs working group took off to a two-day site visit through some of Brandenburg's most sparsely populated territories, Barnim and Uckermark. Averaging at a mere 39 inhabitants per square kilometre and a relatively high unemployment rate of 12.2%, which doubles the German overall average of ca. 6%, the Uckermark in particular showcases how sparsely populated and remote rural areas are increasingly challenged by demographic (upward) shifts and the associated effects on basic infrastructure supply and social cohesion.



In the course of our study trip we learned how freedom to experiment may constitute a crucial component for creating social and lasting innovation; that the interregional transfer of ideas and concepts can lead to enhanced employment opportunities and reducing the labour demand/supply mismatch; and that the perseverance of dedicated and determined individuals as well as a deep understanding for their local ecosystem and the potentials associated therewith lie at the core of transforming community life and social change.

What have we learned in 2017?

Conclusions after four interregional visits

- The four interregional site visits held from April to June of 2017 in the frame of the SOCENT SPAs project have provided ample opportunity to observe and learn from the regions' different approaches of social entrepreneurship. In the course of the visits, we have made the following observations:*
- The situation in Spain and Slovakia is hard to compare to Finland, as Finland is a universalistic welfare state. Services provided by initiatives as La Exclusiva in Soria are taken care of by the Finnish municipalities in the form of taxi vouchers, which are available to those entitled (e.g. the elderly without other possibilities of transport) to do their shopping, visit doctors and take care of official matters.*
- Castille and Leon, Spain is a good example of advanced depopulation and its consequences for the whole region, if depopulation trends are not tackled in an early stage.*

http://www.diariodesoria.es/noticias/soria/poblacion-marca-minimo-historico-88-830-habitantes_87007.html

• *Possibly due to a more similar social service structure, German examples of social enterprises were easier to compare to and apply for Lapland. Similar initiatives exist in both Brandenburg and Lapland, e.g. the*

<http://mug-brandenburg.de/> work integration social enterprise and the <https://salla.4h.fi/> association's employment initiative

• *Something that was observed in all four regions was that successful initiatives, such as in*

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Altk%C3%BCnkendorf>

<http://www.muranskadlhaluka.sk/>

<http://www.heraldodesoria.es/noticias/soria/soria-provincia/2017/05/29/magana-gana-concurso-hispasat-para-tener-ano-gratis-acceso-internet-1178356-1521033.html>

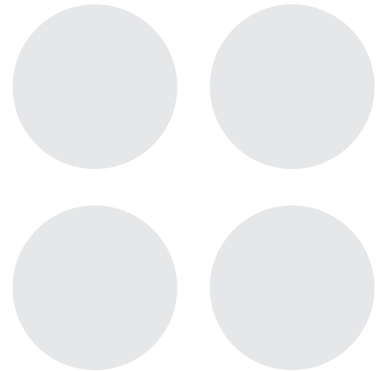
<http://www.visitsodankyla.fi/en/travel/welcome.php>, were often carried and initiated by one person, who took on a pioneering role

Other activities

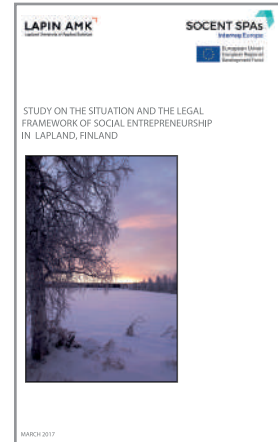
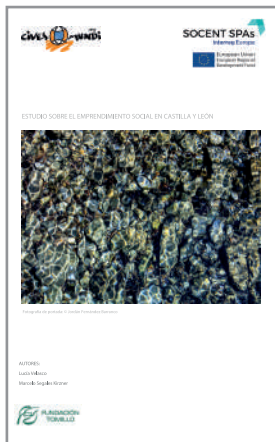
- *On November 15 and 16, a thematic interregional workshop to highlight the origin of depopulation (background, past and present situation), its consequences and existing measures/plans undertaken, their success and failures in each participating region was organized in Brandenburg by Social Impact. The workshop included guest speakers specialized in the specific topics and counted with the participation of all partners and key public and private stakeholders from each region.*
- *Three Interreg Europe projects focused on social enterprises (SOCIAL SEEDS, RaiSE and SOCENTSPAs) have united their efforts to organise a Brokerage in Brussels on 12 & 13 December 2017. This was the first time that three Interreg Europe projects with a similar topic organise an event together. The event facilitated interregional exchange of policies and practical knowledge between regional economic developers, policy makers, public authorities, social enterprises, social entrepreneurs, social impact investors, business accelerators and academia, as well as the establishment of international cooperation agreements.*



- *The first week of December our project was presented in the European Commission Expert Group on Social Entrepreneurship, Geces, by the Social Impact gGmbH CEO Norbert Kunz, in the session 'Focus on local/regional eco-systems: policies and projects'.*
- *On November 10, 11 and 12, SOCENTSPAs participated in Presura, the first fair for the repopulation of Spain Vacía, which was held in Soria. More than 60 exhibitors participated in the fair and more than 3,000 people attended.*



*Four studies on the social entrepreneurship
in Castile and leon, Brandenburg,
Gemera Region and lapland*



<https://www.interregeurope.eu/socentspas/library/>
(Folder: Studies on the social entrepreneurship)

What are we going to do in 2018?

- *A thematic interregional workshop will be organized in Slovakia to analysis and reflect on the present and future of Social entrepreneurship in the participating regions from different perspectives including legislation, finance, capacity building and support to social entrepreneurs.*
- *An Interregional round table in combination with case studies and good practices selections on how to support SE in SPAs will be organized in Spain. The event will be an opportunity to exchange experience/practices on how to support entrepreneurship development and capacity building, how to setup and manage seed capital facilities, how to build social entrepreneurial capacities among youth.*
- *A thematic seminar will be organized in Finland for a public presentation of the selected best good practices to support social entrepreneurship in SPAs.*
- *Four bilateral visits between two participating regions will be organized to strengthen the experiences and good practices exchange.*

- *Business Breakfast (BB) with service providers for SMEs in Slovakia to emphasize that SEs are part of SMEs ecosystem and deserve special legal support.*
- *Further meetings with identified key stakeholders will be organized to give them the opportunity to exchange their point of views, share problems and bring together ideas for future development.*
- *The participating regions will start drafting their action plan aiming at integrating the lessons learnt from interregional cooperation into their policies to foster social entrepreneurship in SPAs*

Project Partners

**General Directorate for Social Economy and
Self-Employed Persons - Regional Government of Castile and León (ES)**

NGOD Cives Mundi (ES)

Social Impact (DE)

Lapland University of Applied Sciences (FI)

Not-for-profit organization EPIC (SK)

Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (SK)



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