



Regional study on the exchange process

Region Austria

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1. Introduction

The activities in the first part of the project have provided to each project partner the opportunity to interact with different sort of stakeholders at different levels, within their own regions and with stakeholders of other regions and countries. This has led to a learning and capacity building processes that have allowed not only to generate the “Towards EMAS Action Plan” but also to improve and reinforce other aspects that concern the competencies of the partners.

This second part of the Regional Study of the Interreg Europe ENHANCE Project aims to present the main lessons learned from the exchange process that has taken place during the two years of the project.

2. Lessons learnt from the SHM, IM & WS

The contribution of the identification of best practices/regulatory reliefs together with the stakeholders has led to many EMAS activities and will identify possible drawbacks affecting the uptake of EMAS. Based on the identified best practises, we have worked out new proposals for regulatory reliefs in close cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism and other stakeholders.

The exchange of expertise was one of the most relevant aspects to foster the communication between different stakeholders. The different kinds of meetings gave different kinds of insights:

Workshops: in depth knowledge of interesting topics with experts from other countries, gaining new inputs/know-how/tools/regulatory instruments for our own region

International Meeting: practical insight, getting in touch with EMAS organisations in other regions and getting new ideas for our EMAS organisations

Stakeholder meeting: learning different points of view eg. from authorities, ministries, organisations, open discussion, possibility to learn from each other

3. Interaction and cooperation with stakeholders

Having the possibility to collect and analyse all of our own regulatory reliefs, thus gaining in depth knowledge of the current situation in Austria was very valuable. The availability of time and resources started an improvement processes. Regional stakeholder workshops offered the possibility to invite all relevant stakeholders for EMAS. This has brought together a lot of different stakeholder for the first time. This has triggered fruitful discussions and the exchange of experiences. This showed that a joint approach for the realisation of regulatory reliefs is welcomed by the stakeholders as their needs are included. During the stakeholder workshops and the project implementation of ENHANCE new possible regulatory reliefs were brought up.

Due to the project we had the possibility to exchange ideas/knowledge/experience with different experts from different stakeholder groups. To see the different points of view from the stakeholders was very helpful. It was a great experience to get people involved in specific topics and find a common solution in the workshops together.

We will definitely continue to interact with our stakeholders. We are already in close exchange processes with some stakeholders and will continue to do so in order to follow our action plan.

4. Main lessons learnt from the professionals involved as SH

The stakeholders are involved in the following activities of the project:

- Identification of the current status of environmental management systems in Austria with regard to implementation, barriers and opportunities.
- Evaluation of best practices detected during the interregional learning process regarding EMAS promotion which will be the base for the development of the action plan

Most of the feedbacks after the stakeholder meetings were really positive. Because of the workshops, some problems, especially communication problems, could be solved right at the workshop itself. Those “quick wins” helped to find solutions for barriers and motivated the stakeholders. Also, it showed that it is crucial to interact with all kinds of stakeholder on a regular basis in order to prevent misunderstandings and problems before they occur. Everybody who was involved is very positive and enthusiastic, as the project is very unique. The stakeholders were very satisfied that the Environment Agency Austria together with the Austrian Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism are looking for more opportunities for EMAS organisation.

5. Main lessons learnt from the cooperation with other partners

Inputs from other partners about their approaches and regulatory reliefs have led us to reflect our own approaches and reliefs. Some of the approaches/reliefs were discussed in earlier years in Austria too; however they were not

implemented because of different reasons. Gaining the inputs from other regions, those earlier decisions were questioned and reflected upon. Some of those topics are picked up again and we are giving them a re-evaluation. Also, existing reliefs are looked at from another point of view. Even though the relief already exists, we will question ourselves how we can improve them, are there better ways to do it, etc.

However, it was sometime difficult to learn from the other countries. This was because of the different legal systems in each country. Even though we would have liked to take specific reliefs from other partners, we could not use them because of our different legal system. So it was difficult to implement regulatory reliefs from other countries.

6. Other lessons learnt and actions to be implemented

There is a need to involve other parties with related environmental competences (other levels and units of the same administration) in order to ensure a coordinated and effective deployment of the project.

Certain barriers are difficult to overcome because there is a lack of experience and in some cases time consuming processes are required; learning from other Regions allows a better and more efficient implementation of the required processes in relation to the advantages for SME within the policy instrument.

Due to the stakeholder workshops two already existing reliefs could be improved:

- The recurring check of operating installations is regulated in §82b of the Industry Regulations Act (GewO). It obliges each holder of a commercial plant to have it checked or reviewed at certain intervals (every 5 years). EMAS and ISO 14001 organisations can skip the §82b reporting obligation if they have checked all §82b requirements within the internal audit. – After changing the Industry Regulations Act, the exemption of the reporting obligation was not very clear for the authorities. After one of our stakeholder meetings the Austrian Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism drafted a better wording. The new proposal is currently discussed in the Austrian Parliament.

- Companies from each sector must create a waste management concept for each site, which employs more than 20 employees. The concept must be updated at least every seven years. This is checked by the competent authorities. EMAS registered companies are not obliged to deliver a waste management concept if they are publishing an environmental statement with the relevant information. – Many authorities did not trust in this relief and still asked for the waste management concept. After one of our stakeholder meetings the Austrian Federal Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism drafted a letter to the authorities, reassuring them about the relief. This letter can be send by the Ministry itself or by EMAS companies and has already led to a better implementation of the relief.

7. Conclusions

ENHANCE project allows a positive cross fertilization process among different policies and tools. The project also allowed us take a deeper look into existing regulatory reliefs and into good practices from partner countries. The regular stakeholder meetings have fostered our communication with the Austrian EMAS community and have already led to improvements of regulatory reliefs. With the implementation of the Action Plan we hope to continue the success story of ENHANCE in Austria.