



Regional study on the exchange process

Region *Estonia*

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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 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 policy instrument that the ENHANCE project addresses in Estonia focuses on increasing the resource efficiency of the businesses and especially SMEs. Resource and energy efficiency, however, is often implemented through individual projects. EMAS enhances the system approach of resource efficiency through different levels of operations. To promote and foster RE in enterprises through EMAS there must be in place a comprehensive policy framework and national support measures, which has been insufficient so far in Estonia. The national support measures for fostering resource efficiency through EMAS have not been comprehensive and have not been encouraging enterprises to adopt systematically good environmental practices. The activities and outputs of ENHANCE project have been aimed to improve the management of policy instrument by providing a Towards EMAS Action Plan with measures that would incentivise the implementation of EMAS and thus lead to increased resource productivity and efficiency. The ENHANCE project provided a framework and platform for identifying the potentially good measures for incentivising EMAS implementation.

International meeting gave a good overview and practical insight of the various regulatory instruments implemented in different countries. It also allowed getting in touch with EMAS organisations in other regions and gaining new ideas for our EMAS organisations.

Thematic Workshops allowed for in depth and interesting discussions in concrete and very relevant topics with experts from other project countries. This enabled gaining new knowledge on which regulatory instruments and how to implement various regulatory instruments in our own country. Also, discussions of benefits and constraints of implementing various regulatory instruments facilitated the choice of the most suitable and feasible instruments to the proposed and implemented in Estonia.

International meeting and thematic workshops also enabled to bring along the most relevant stakeholders who were able to personally exchange contacts and experiences with their counterparts in project partner countries.

Local Stakeholder Meetings allowed to involve various stakeholders e.g. authorities, ministries, organisations, businesses into the process of choosing

the most suitable measures for Estonia via open discussion on the potential measures to be implemented in Estonia. Stakeholder meetings also enabled to learn from the points of view of different stakeholders.

The contribution of the identification of best practices/regulatory relieves 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 and experience exchange SEI Tallinn together the Ministry of the Environment developed new proposals for regulatory reliefs, which will be the basis for the modification and further development of the existing policy framework and measures.

3. Interaction and cooperation with stakeholders

The main stakeholders that were involved into the activities of ENHANCE project during the first project phase were Ministry of the Environment and other environmental authorities (Environmental Board, Environmental Inspectorate, Environmental Agency, etc.) and businesses (directly via representatives of companies as well as via Estonia Association of Environmental Management, EKJA).

As the Towards EMAS Action Plan developed within the ENHANCE project has been a priority area for the Ministry of the Environment, it has been easy to involve them into the process. Especially that increasing resource efficiency and activities supporting circular economy are currently very topical. The involvement of businesses has been less successful because many companies are not familiar with EMAS and do not see potential of it. At the same time, the discussions with the businesses during the stakeholder meetings were very fruitful and gave important input to the process of developing the Towards EMAS Action Plan. The opinions of the businesses about the feasibility of different measures proposed were taken into consideration when selecting and fine-tuning the measures in the action plan.

From the discussions with the businesses it was evident that the most incentivising are measures that provide some financial benefits, such as reduction or exemption from the financial guarantees, exemption from the environmental charges. Especially because implementing and keeping EMAS

registration is quite costly. The biggest benefit can be gained when the financial benefits can be combined with reduced bureaucracy, such as reduced monitoring or simplified application of environmental permits.

The cooperation and interaction with the stakeholders continues during the second phase of the project when the proposed actions are actually implemented.

Involving the stakeholders in the exchange process also has enabled to increase the awareness of EMAS, which is very important for the success of EMAS scheme.

4. Main lessons learnt from the professionals involved as SH

The professional were involved in both local stakeholder meetings as well as in the international thematic workshops.

In general we received positive feedback from both the stakeholders taking part in the local stakeholder meetings as well as thematic workshops. Participating in the local stakeholder meetings helped the professionals to better understand the local conditions and the feasibility of different measures proposed for the Towards EMAS Action Plan in Estonia. As for the professionals taking part in the thematic workshops, it allowed them to improve their knowledge of political framework in other countries as well as different interpretations of European-wide requirements. This enhanced also their input into the local action plan development process.

5. Main lessons learnt from the cooperation with other partners

Estonia did not have many practices to highlight in the process of collecting the good practices but there were very many good practices from other project countries (especially Catalonia, Italy and Austria) that were worth to analyse and replicate. Therefore, the knowledge and experience exchange via partner meetings and thematic workshop throughout the first phase of the project has been very valuable. Many elements of this new knowledge gained has been used in Estonian Towards EMAS Action Plan.

6. Other lessons learnt and actions to be implemented

In the beginning of the project it was evident that Estonia is rather a receiver of good ideas and experiences in ENHANCE project as giver because there are not many good practices that can be highlighted in Estonia. The ENHANCE project enabled us to understand that we also have some good examples to show and have implemented some beneficial measures, either in the past or at the present times. The meetings and experience exchange during the ENHANCE project, furthermore, enabled us to learn how can we improve the current policy measures. For example, we have financial support for organisations implementing EMAS for the first time. But there is no support for renewal of EMAS registration. Perhaps that can be further analysed and the conditions for financial support regarding EMAS registration and implementation re-considered.

7. Conclusions

The ENHANCE project has provided various opportunities to learn both from the experiences of other countries but also from professionals of our own country who can better reflect how the foreign examples can be transferred and replicated in Estonia. Both learning-processes have been very important in the process of developing the Towards EMAS Action Plan for Estonia. These experiences will also be valuable in the future implementation phase of the action plan.