

Action plan for Podravje, Slovenia

To be implemented and monitored
from January 2019 – December 2020

Regional Action Plan for Podravje, Slovenia focusing on the improvement of the Regional Development Programme of Podravje Region (RDP) 2014-2020

Part I – General information

Project:	Innova Foster
Partner organisation:	SRC Bistra Ptuj
Other partner organisations involved (if relevant):	
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About the Innova Foster project

The importance of startups in a modern economy is undeniable. New, innovative businesses play a vital role in determining how dynamic a region's or city's innovation will be. Startups reinvigorate the business community, increase competition for innovation, introduce new products, services, and business models, create new markets and offer innovative solutions to emerging problems.

The project Innova Foster brings together seven European countries: Ireland, Spain, Malta, Slovenia, Estonia, Poland, and the UK, to address the challenge and improve the public policies and programmes supporting the development of innovation and startups ecosystems.

The Innova Foster first phase activities were consisted of several study visits, interregional thematic workshops and peer reviews. Every partner has identified 2 best practices in their startup ecosystem. These actions are the basis for the design of seven Regional Action Plans (one per partner) that should contribute to de-risk the development and scale-up of novel public services.

Another aim of the project regards encouraging the stakeholder's engagement, identifying clusters of experience across Europe and sharing the experience.

Startup ecosystem in Podravje, Slovenia

The statistical data shows that **16% of Slovenia's population lived in the Podravska statistical region** in 2016. The region generated 13% of the national GDP, but GDP per capita was the fifth lowest in the country. The region had slightly over 26,000 enterprises with on average 4.5 persons employed.

One of the quite deeply rooted Slovenian social norms is the belief that most people in Slovenia would prefer **that everyone had a similar standard of living**. According to the GEM 2016 successful entrepreneurs are highly respected in Slovenia. Although Slovenians hold successful entrepreneurs in high regard, their belief that entrepreneurship is a good career choice is much lower.

In Slovenia, over half of the adult population trusts in their entrepreneurial capabilities and competences, this ranks Slovenia high in the 5th place among the European countries. Unfortunately, this **(self-perceived) entrepreneurial potential is not realized**, especially in those areas and with such companies that would result in economic growth and new job creation. There are **twice as much men as women entrepreneurs** in Slovenia. The majority of them are **25-44 years old**. There are two most important groups regarding their education; i.e. secondary education and the highest education.

The potential for the creation of a large number of new jobs and a high added value, which both point to the quality of entrepreneurial activity, greatly depends on the entrepreneur's aspirations and how innovative the firm is when faced with entrepreneurial challenges. In Slovenia, almost **half of entrepreneurs believe that they have a product or service which is new** for some or even for all of their potential customers. 45% believe that they use relatively new technologies (i.e., technologies available for fewer than five years).

The majority of the startups are in the capital, Ljubljana. Second biggest concentration of startups is in Maribor, which is the largest town in Podravje. Towns of Ptuj and Ormož, the most important towns in Podravje after Maribor are also interesting for startups.

Maribor has University incubator called Tovarna podjetij/Venture factory and cooperative for social entrepreneurship called Tkalka/Weaver. There's also a technological park called Štajerski tehnološki park/Styrian Technology Park near Maribor.

There are no business incubator in Ptuj, but the startups community is addressed by Start:up Ptuj Programmes and events, which are jointly organised by SRC Bistra Ptuj, Venture factory and School Centre Ptuj. There's also a vibrant ICT startup community around companies Intera, Ptuj and an international startup Databox located in Ptuj.

A business incubator founded by municipality of Ormož gathers startups in Ormož, including social entrepreneurs.

Initiative Start:up Slovenia with their branches in Maribor and Ptuj launches a lot of news feeds from the startup community and the startup ecosystem resulting in constant presence of startup stories in media.

Entrepreneurs use different sources of finances and different combinations of these sources to finance the startup of their ventures. **The entrepreneur's personal funds** are one of the most frequent primary sources of financing nascent and new ventures. This usually entails using one's own savings, working at home, seeking free-of-charge advice, and the like. In Slovenia, the percentage of new entrepreneurs who use their own funds to finance a new venture is 73%.

When it comes to **financing**, the Slovene Enterprise Fund joins in with its products during these times. It offers startups products P2, SK75 and SK200, which jointly provide up to €329.000 of seed capital per company, including an intense advisory, educational and mentoring supporting programme. Public programmes are planned and coordinated by the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology.

The implementation and promotion of these public programmes is done by the Start:up Slovenia Initiative, which is an active connector and promotor of all public and private stakeholders in the Slovenian startup ecosystem. The international accelerators and venture capital funds are active in Slovenia and the Business Angels of Slovenia club, have also contributed to the quick growth of the ecosystem and the growing number of global successes of Slovenian startups.

There's also an **annual business conference** organised in Maribor. PODIM is the biggest and most influential startup conference in the Alps-Adriatic region. A part of PODIM is also the announcement of the Slovenian Startup of the Year, which is the project of active stakeholders of the Slovenian startup ecosystem.

According to World Bank's Doing Business Survey Slovenia is among **the top five countries with the least number of procedures required to start a new business**. Not only that: it is the cheapest place on the planet to launch a new corporation. Another advantage highlighted by the report is Slovenia's high level of security for investors.

Part II – Policy context

The Action Plan aims to impact:	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Investment for Growth and Jobs programme
	<input type="checkbox"/>	European Territorial Cooperation programme
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other regional development policy instrument
Name of the policy instrument addressed:	Operational Programme for the Implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy in the Period 2014-2020 – REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OF PODRAVJE REGION (RDP) 2014-2020	

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME OF PODRAVJE REGION (RDP) 2014-2020

The main purpose and goal of the Regional Development Program (RDP) 2014-2020 was **the identification of the development potentials of the Podravje region**, and furthermore to reach a **consensus and agreement** on regional development priorities. With the Regional Development Program of Podravje region the economic, social, spatial, environmental and cultural development is harmonised, and possible instruments as well as resources for their implementation are defined.

The RRP document is divided into **four sections** as follows:

- The introductory part presents the purpose and course of the elaboration of the RRP.
- The regional analysis gives statistical overview of the current situation in the region and an assessment of the implementation of the RDP 2007-2013.
- The third, strategic part defines the regional development potentials, the key development obstacles and the advantages of the region. Furthermore, it determines the development goals and regional priorities as well as specialization of the region.
- The last part lists the projects through which the set development goals in the period 2014-2020 could be achieved.

In accordance with the Act on the Promotion of Balanced Regional Development the mayors of 16 municipalities in Spodnje (lower) Podravje established sub regional development partnership called the **Spodnje Podravje Regional Development Partnership**, which is a part of wider development partnership of 41 municipalities in Podravje. SRC Bistra Ptuj is authorised organisation for elaboration and monitoring of RDP in the part that is related to Spodnje Podravje.

Legal basis for elaboration of RDP are:

- The Act on the Promotion of Comparative Regional Development (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 20/2011 and Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 57/2012),
- Decree on Regional Development Programs (Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, No. 69/2012) and
- Decree on implementing regulation with endogenous regional policy measures.

In formulating the starting points for the elaboration of RDP the following was considered:

- Europe 2020 Strategy,
- Development Strategy of Slovenia 2014-2020,
- Program of National Development Priorities and Investments 2014-2020,
- Partnership Agreement Slovenia,

- Operational Program for the Implementation of the European Cohesion Policy for the period 2014-2020,
- Smart Specialization Strategy, 2014,
- Rural Development Program,
- National Program for Culture 2014 – 2017.

In Innova Foster project **RDP of Podravje 2014-2020** is the instrument that is targeted, and specially we are focusing on:

- Development priority 1: competitive businesses for growth and jobs, including strengthening research, technological development and innovation
 - Investment area 1.4: Investments in the development of a support ecosystem, including the development and implementation of support services for new, young and growing companies, and financial incentive schemes for start-ups, social enterprises and cooperatives

The aspect of innovation, not just technological innovation, but also innovation in business models and social innovations are not sufficiently tackled by the RDP of Podravje. The statistics data for year 2017 shows that the value added per employee in Podravje is only 29.681 € and is lower than average in Slovenia (32.128 €). The most developed Slovenian region of Central Slovenia with the capital Ljubljana had the value added per employee much higher (47.678 €) in 2017. The region of Central Slovenia has the most developed startup ecosystem in Slovenia, active initiative Start:up Slovenia, incubators, technological parks, accelerators and many other support for startups and therefore the highest degree of innovativeness.

The involvement of partner SRC Bistra Ptuj in Innova Foster project further facilitates and fosters the collaboration among business support organisations in the region and disseminates the project activities including this action plan among policy development organisations (municipalities and support organisations). During the study visit in Ptuj in October 2017 a special meeting with policy responsible organisations and other stakeholders was organised as a part of activities for engagement of stakeholders into the project. Furthermore, 2 stakeholders' meetings with 16 and 15 participants, respectively were organised in the phase of elaboration and reconciliation of this action plan in periods 3 and 4 of the project. This action plan is the result of joint work and consolidated viewpoints and experiences of relevant stakeholders for RDP of Podravje 2014-2020 upgraded with lessons learnt from the project study visits, peer reviews and thematic seminars. Since SRC Bistra Ptuj is authorised organisation for elaboration and monitoring of RDP in Spodnje Podravje this action plan is signed by SRC Bistra Ptuj. The final version of this action plan approved by JTS of Interreg Europe will be presented at the meeting of the Regional Counsel constituted by mayors of all municipalities in Podravje in order to officially endorse it. The endorsement of the action plan will be noticed in the minutes of the Regional Counsel meeting and not signed because this is common for endorsement of all documents, including RDP of Podravje 2014-2020. Even more important for this action plan is the support of the business support organisations in the region because they are the players involved in the individual actions and will execute the actions.

Part III – Details of the actions envisaged

This action plan is elaborated to improve the support system for startups in Podravje in order to increase the innovativeness of young companies and startup teams. The knowledge about efficient startup ecosystems and best practices of support for startups gathered by study visits, peer reviews and thematic seminars in the Phase 1 of project Innova Foster were considered in elaboration of this action plan. Another important factor considered in it are meetings with stakeholders, which were used to get refreshed information about startup ecosystem in Podravje and to discuss the possible measures to improve it through RDP of Podravje 2014-2020.

During the Phase I of the project Innova Foster when the startup ecosystems of the involved regions were discussed in detail and presented in situ during the study visits, peer reviews (partners and stakeholders present on the individual locations discussing the ecosystems of the host) and thematic seminars many **inspirations** for Podravje Action plan were found. The most interesting were the following:

- The program in Tartu provided by SPARK & sTARTUp HUB “**Entrepreneurship Village teaching children entrepreneurship**”, where children are getting the entrepreneurial competences by playing games and talking about familiar entrepreneurs. In this manner the entrepreneurial spirit in the wider society is empowered. In Slovenia, and in Podravje we need good stories, but even more we need to talk about them with children on a level they understand.
- **Tartu entrepreneurial week, Maltese business training and Torun business school** with extensive workshops, seminars and trainings are good practices from abroad that help new entrepreneurs build up business competences. Even **Cork in Ireland** being one of the most developed and internationally noted for business success recognises the importance of the constant business training programs provided by University and Local Enterprise Office Cork City. Starting a business, especially for engineers, technicians and graduates of nature sciences studies is especially hard at the beginning. In Slovenia is much easier to start a business on a paper than get good business knowledge that is essential for success. The systematic non-formal vocational education is therefore very important also for Podravje.
- Startup weekend is a standard method for developing business models upon business ideas in practically all analysed ecosystems (Torun, Cork, Tartu, Manchester, Cork, Malta, Madrid). Also, in Slovenia this is commonly used method in incubators. But among all partners only **Tartu (SPARK)** is experimenting in entrepreneurial education of non-adults. This is very interesting for smaller towns in Podravje region, especially Ptuj with secondary schooling institutions, to benefit from early entrepreneurial education of secondary school students in the form of business model development and pitching contest. In this way entrepreneurial competences are gained; the local talents are identified, and the entrepreneurship is gaining popularity among youth.
- Practically all analysed startup ecosystems work on coherency, cooperation and coordination among vital players of startup ecosystem. During the visit in Poland partners and stakeholders participated in the **thematic seminar**, where the maturity of the ecosystems was analysed. One of the fundamental findings was that the condition for maturing is cooperation, communications and dissemination of different activities provided by different structures of the ecosystem. The ecosystem in Podravje is very young compared to the best ones, therefore special attention will be paid to cooperation, communication and coordination of different support organisations.
- Good practise from Cork comes in the form of Innovation Partnership Programme. The cooperation between businesses and research is a constant challenge and it can always be improved. Similar to Cork’s **coherency of business support network** there are also cases found in the ecosystems of Torun, Tartu, Malta and Greater Manchester.

Summarising the lessons learn from study visits, analysing different startup ecosystems, peer reviews and suggestions from local stakeholders and policy makers, the following **opportunities for improvement** were

identified and the following impact of the measures foreseen in this action plan on the targeted instrument of RDP of Podravje 2014-2020 is planned:

1. Overcoming the bad reputation of entrepreneurship
2. Improving the business and innovation skills and competences among young entrepreneurs
3. Improving the cooperation among different support organisations

Under these opportunities the following actions were selected for implementation:

1. Overcoming the bad reputation of entrepreneurship in the Slovenian society
A1: Promotion of innovative entrepreneurship among primary school students
A2: Promotion of innovative entrepreneurship among secondary school students
2. Improving the business and innovation skills and competences among young entrepreneurs
A3: Organisation of workshops and seminars for entrepreneurs
A4: Educating and mentoring social entrepreneurs and cooperatives
3. Improving the cooperation among different support organisations
A5: Bridging startup support organisations in Podravje

ACTION 1: Promotion of innovative entrepreneurship among primary school students

1. The background

The analysis of the startup ecosystem in Podravje that was made during the Phase I of the project Innova Foster showed that although Slovenians hold successful entrepreneurs in high regard, their belief that entrepreneurship is a good career choice is much lower. One of the quite deeply rooted Slovenian social norms is the belief that most people in Slovenia would prefer that everyone had a similar standard of living.

The perception of business opportunities is one of the core components of entrepreneurship; without it, entrepreneurship is not possible. In 2013, a modest 16% of the Slovenian population believed that good business opportunities existed in the areas in which they lived; this percentage increased to 17.3% in 2014 and 20.5% in 2015. In 2016, this percentage increased slightly, too, as the average of 25.3% of people perceived good opportunities for starting a new business. Nevertheless, this percentage still ranks Slovenia at the bottom end of the global scale: 59th place among the 65 participating economies.

There are many stories of corrupt entrepreneurs and managers, who had contributed to bad reputation of business people during the last 20 years in the Slovenian society. But on the other hand, successful entrepreneurs are respected in Slovenian society. In this action plan we are aiming to overcome the bad reputation by presenting the success stories to older children (12-15 years-old) and to shift the social perception of entrepreneurship toward success and respect on a long term.

During the study visit in Tartu, Estonia a good example how to promote entrepreneurship to children was shown by SPARK. They organise business games for children and networking events with successful entrepreneurs. They celebrate their entrepreneurs. This was an inspiration for this action.

2. Action

The promotion of innovative entrepreneurship among primary school students will be done by several events (at least 10 in 2019 and 2020), which will be organised for the older students of primary schools in the region. On these events a free discussion about entrepreneurship, innovations and cases of successful entrepreneurs will be encouraged.

In Slovenia, we have many good examples of successful startups. The most prominent is the story of Talking Tom. In cooperation with local partners of SPOT svetovanje Podravje we plan to organise at least 3 workshops a year with primary school children, where the successful startups from Slovenia and globally will be presented and the key factors of their success will be analysed. Games and quizzes will also be included in the events. The career of entrepreneur will be promoted during these workshops.

The steps of the action:

- Identification of primary schools as locations for the promotional events;
- Organisation of the events;
- Monitoring and reporting.

The indicators to monitor the implementation of the action:

- Number of events (list, photo material);
- Number of students attending the events (list of participants of the event).

3. **Players involved**

- ZRS Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) – the organisation and execution of events, partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje (Slovenian business point - Podravje Consulting);
- Štajerska gospodarska zbornica (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Štajerska) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events;
- Zavod Mariborska razvojna agencija (Development agency of Maribor) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events;
- Območna obrtna zbornica Maribor (Chamber of Craft, region Maribor) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events;
- Razvojno informacijski center Slovenska Bistrica (Development and information center Slovenska Bistrica) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events;
- Primary schools in Podravje; the locations of events.

4. **Timeframe**

Jan 2019 - Dec 2020

5. **Costs**

Organisation of events

6. **Funding sources:**

Budget of SPOT svetovanje Podravje (Slovenian business point - Podravje Consulting)

ACTION 2: Promotion of innovative entrepreneurship among secondary school students

1. **The background**

This action also aims at overcoming bad reputation of entrepreneurship in the Slovenian society but involves older students of secondary schools (14-18-year-old). We set up 2 different actions of promotion of innovate entrepreneurship because the maturity of students is different and in Action 2 we want to activate youth for business ideas and activate their entrepreneurship mind set.

As seen in Tartu startup ecosystem, children and young adults are the best ambassadors of entrepreneurial spirit and their business ideas are the most likely to be highly innovative.

The innovative entrepreneurship will be promoted by a programme called Entrepreneurial challenge, where SRC Bistra Ptuj and secondary School centre of Ptuj will work closely together on business models developed by students. The students will have beside mentoring teachers also mentors from industry and other business support organisation in the region of their choice. The programme peak will be the pitching contest of 10 best “startup” teams.

Another important element of this action is extensive promotions by local press, which will be done by Venture factory and Manager club Ptuj as influencers.

The pitching contest was also inspired by lessons learnt in Innova Foster project. The pitching contests are a part of startup weekends in Tartu, Malta, Cork, Oldham and Torun. In Slovenia, Venture Factory, who is responsible for Startup Maribor activities including managing the university incubator also organises startup weekends and hackathons in Maribor. With this action we want to set “a startup nest in Ptuj” resulting in young startup teams, that can be included in Startup Maribor programmes when they get old and mature enough.

2. Action

We plan to carry out the Entrepreneurial challenge in years 2019 and 2020 (2 final events) for students of secondary school in Ptuj. The steps of the programme will be the same every year:

- Formation of programme board constituted by members from SRC Bistra Ptuj and Secondary school of Ptuj, who will organise the whole Entrepreneurial challenge of the year;
- Call for student business ideas and student “startup” teams;
- Selection of 10-12 best ideas / teams;
- Mentoring the selected teams in developing the business models and for the pitching contest;
- Pitching contest;
- PR activities to promote the pitching ideas;
- Monitoring and reporting.

The indicators to monitor the implementation of the action:

- Number of events (list, photo material);
- Number of available mentors (list);
- Number of attendees of the pitching contest (list of participants of the event);
- Number of supported student startup teams (list);
- Number of publications in press and on web pages (list, published articles and web articles).

3. Players involved

- ZRS Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) – the organisation of events, participation in programme board;
- Šolski center Ptuj (School centre Ptuj) - participation in programme board, providing mentoring teachers, providing the students startup teams, location of the pitching contest;
- Manager klub Ptuj (Manager club Ptuj) – providing mentors from industry and other companies, sponsor of the event, promotion of pitching ideas;
- Mestna občina Ptuj (Municipality of Ptuj) – co-financing the programme;
- Tovarna podjetov (Venture Factory, university incubator) – promotion of pitching ideas, PR.

4. Timeframe

Jan 2019 – Sep 2020

5. Costs

Organisation of the pitching contest, promotion

6. Funding sources

Budget of Municipality of Ptuj, sponsors

ACTION 3: Organisation of workshops and seminars for entrepreneurs outside university incubator

1. The background

Venture Factory (Tovarna podjetij in Slovenije) is responsible for Startup Maribor activities including managing the university incubator. The startup ecosystem in Podravje is the most developed in the largest town in the region, i.e. Maribor.

Venture Factory organises events such as startup mĩsli including several workshops, seminars and networking events every week. The best practice from Slovenia, which is managed mostly by Venture Factory is the business conference PODIM. Every year PODIM is bridging the global and regional startup ecosystems with a massive impact in the European Adriatic and Western Balkans. During the conference startups can participate in PODIM Challenge and in the Start-up of the year Award Ceremony.

Similar startup weekends, hackathons and business conferences were reported by all other partners of Innova Foster, therefore, a conclusion can be that these methods are typical for developed startup ecosystems.

Outside Maribor and outside university incubator, the startup ecosystem is less developed in the region. Usually, the best startups formed all over the region of Podravje usually migrate to Maribor or even to the capital of Slovenia, to Ljubljana, and very successful startups will spread internationally or even move abroad. This contributes to brain (and income, and added value, and innovativeness) drain of region Podravje and is not desirable by RDP Podravje 2014-2020.

As the Oldham experience showed, when there's a bigger, more developed startup ecosystem (such as greater Manchester) in the region it is crucial to be a part of it, but also to be active locally. This can be translated into the relationship between the greater startup ecosystem in Podravje with the region centre of Maribor and smaller Ptuj. In this action we have 2 goals, firstly, to efficiently support startups, who are mature enough to be included in the programmes offered mostly by Venture Factory and secondly, to offer support to startups, who wants to stay in Ptuj or in the surroundings. Anyway, Maribor is only 30 km from Ptuj and well logistically connected.

Another inspiration for this action comes from Innova Foster regarding vocational education support for startups and improvement of the business skills. A lot of startupers, who are highly technologically innovative, are engineers or nature science studies graduates and they lack business skills. In Tartu have Entrepreneurial week with seminars and workshops for startupers and prospects every year, in Cork University and Cork City cooperate to deliver trainings for young entrepreneurs and in Torun University and TRDA support startupers with seminars and trainings.

Considering the needs of local startups and entrepreneurs at the beginning of business career and the goal to help startups to be more innovative gives a logical response in Action 3: organising the workshops and seminars for entrepreneurs outside university incubator to improve the business and innovation skills and competences among local young entrepreneurs.

2. Action

The steps of the action:

- Organisation of the local workshops and seminars (at least 10 in 2019 and 2020);
- Informing the local startups and entrepreneurs about programmes of university incubator in Maribor;
- Monitoring and reporting.

The indicators to monitor the implementation of the action:

- Number of events (list, photo material);
- Number of participants (list of participants of the event).

3. Players involved

- Zavod Mariborska razvojna agencija (Development agency of Maribor) – lead partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events, a regional partner in activities to make better startup ecosystem in Podravje;
- ZRS Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) – the organisation of events, partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje (Slovenian business point - Podravje Consulting);
- Tovarna podjetij (Venture Factory) – management of university incubator, Start-up Maribor events, a regional partner in activities to make better startup ecosystem in Podravje;
- Štajerska gospodarska zbornica (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Štajerska) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events, a regional partner in activities to make better startup ecosystem in Podravje;
- Območna obrtna zbornica Maribor (Chamber of Craft, region Maribor) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events, a regional partner in activities to make better startup ecosystem in Podravje;
- Razvojno informacijski center Slovenska Bistrica (Development and information center Slovenska Bistrica) – partner of SPOT svetovanje Podravje; the design of events, a regional partner in activities to make better startup ecosystem in Podravje.

4. Timeframe

Jan 2019 – Dec 2020

5. Costs

Organisation of local workshops and seminars

6. Funding sources

Budget of SPOT svetovanje Podravje (Slovenian business point - Podravje Consulting)

ACTION 4: Educating and mentoring social entrepreneurs and cooperatives

1. The background

Social enterprises combine societal goals with an entrepreneurial spirit. These organisations focus on achieving wider social, environmental or community objectives. While it is admirable to build a successful business of any kind, some entrepreneurs do more than just make a profit. Some actually help others, bringing resources, opportunities, training, and other assets to those who need them most. These social entrepreneurs use their know-how and business savvy to make the world a better place,

combining a traditional business model with a pressing social mission in ways that have been helping to make big changes in places around the world for decades.

Although European Commission has been aiming to create a favourable financial, administrative and legal environment for these enterprises so that they can operate on an equal footing with other types of enterprises in the same sector for several years the lessons learnt from Innova Foster project show completely different picture when it comes to support ecosystems. The peer reviews of analyses of startup ecosystems in Innova Foster project following every study visit organised by partners of the project Innova Foster (i.e. Tartu, Malta, Ptuj, Cork, Torun, Oldham and Madrid) with participants of partners and their accompanying stakeholders showed that only Slovenia reported an incubator for social enterprises in Maribor in the local startup ecosystem. The local diagnosis of all studied startup ecosystems are published on the project website <https://www.interregeurope.eu/innovafoster/>. Furthermore, the conclusion of peer review (partners and their accompanying stakeholders from Estonia, Poland, United Kingdom, Spain and Malta) organised in Ptuj for Podravje startup ecosystem was also that social entrepreneurs need different approach to support them.

The experiences in Podravje revealed that social entrepreneurs need business education and mentoring the most. They are usually not primarily educated in economics and the business part of their venture is the weakest one. Therefore, we chose the action 4 to offer the social entrepreneurs most needed support - education and mentoring.

RDP of Podravje 2014-2020 also differentiates start-ups, social enterprises and cooperatives. This action can hugely contribute to support ecosystem for social enterprises and cooperatives.

2. Action

The steps of the action:

- The identification of social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives in Podravje;
- Identification of needs for education and mentoring of at least 5 social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives in Podravje;
- Design of the education program;
- Building the network of mentors;
- Inclusion of at least 5 social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives in Podravje into the program of education and mentoring, which will be a combination of mandatory courses and individual courses and counselling;
- Assigning the general mentor, who will follow the progress of the included social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives;
- Implementation of the program of education and mentoring;
- Monitoring and reporting.

The indicators to monitor the implementation of the action:

- Number of supported social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives (list);
- Number of persons in the support ecosystem offering support to social entrepreneurs, cooperatives and initiatives including mentors, counsellors and educators (list);
- Number of events including workshops, seminars, mentoring and counselling meetings - (list);
- Number of participants (list of participants of the event).

3. Players involved

- Fundacija za izboljšanje zaposlitvenih možnosti PRIZMA, ustanova (PRIZMA Foundation for Improvement of Employment Possibilities, an institution) - lead partner of SocioLab (regional project called Active and connected for new jobs and an inclusive society – SocioLab);

- ZRS Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) – partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme in Spodnje Podravje subregion;
- CITILAB, Zavod za razvoj kreativnih tehnologij Maribor, socialno podjetje (CITILAB, Institute for the Development of Creative Technologies, social enterprise) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- PRJ HALO Podeželsko razvojno jedro (HALO Rural Development Core) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Razvojna agencija Slovenske gorice, d.o.o. (Development agency of Slovenske gorice) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Razvojno informacijski center Slovenska Bistrica (Development and information center Slovenska Bistrica) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Štajerska gospodarska zbornica (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Štajerska) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- TKALKA, Zadruga za razvoj družbenih in tehnoloških inovacij z.b.o., socialno podjetje (Weaver, Cooperative for the Development of Social and Technological Innovations, social enterprise) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Zavod PIP, Pravni in informacijski center Maribor (Legal and Information Center Maribor) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Združenje Center alternativne in avtonomne produkcije, socialno podjetje (Association of Alternative and Autonomous Production Center, social enterprise) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme;
- Združenje socialna ekonomija Slovenije, socialno podjetje (Association social economy of Slovenia, social enterprise) - partner of SocioLab; contributing to design and implementation of the support programme.

4. **Timeframe**

Jan 2019 – Dec 2020

5. **Costs**

Organisation of

6. **Funding sources**

Budget of SocioLab

ACTION 5: Bridging startup support organisations in Podravje

1. **The background**

Every peer review of the analyses of startup ecosystems stressed the importance of cooperation among players in the startup and innovation ecosystem. We believe that these systems should be highly interlinked. Good practise from Cork comes in the form of Innovation Partnership Programme. The cooperation between businesses and research is a constant challenge and it can always be improved.

On the other hand, every action to improve cooperation of organisations offering support to startups and scaleups also strongly contribute to the effectiveness of the support ecosystem. As discussed in Torun during the thematic seminar on maturity of ecosystems the diversity of ecosystem is good, and cooperation is necessary. If we consider the startup ecosystem a conglomerate of startups, incubators,

accelerators, VCs, universities, freelancers, software houses and governmental and public institutions; we also must consider that every organisation has diverse interests. Every ecosystem studied in Innova Foster project (Malta, Tartu, Torun, Cork, Greater Manchester with Oldham, Spain and Podravje) have examples how better cooperation among providers of support improves conditions not just for business but also for living.

Another lesson learnt from Innova Foster project is that the cooperation must be facilitated, and this facilitation should be constant. Great results were achieved by considering this in Cork, Tartu and Oldham, especially. This was an inspiration for the action 5 in this action plan. SRC Bistra Ptuj will facilitate the cooperation among providers of support, national and local government and startups (classical and social) in the years of 2019 and 2020. This will be done by organising networking and exchange of practice meeting. The aim of this meetings is to exchange information about services, projects, actions and strategies of individual partners and to attract other organisation in events and actions of organisers.

In this action we are planning to combine events that other institutions are organising with an annual networking event for stakeholders of startup ecosystem in Podravje, organised by SRC Bistra Ptuj. On events organised by other institutions SRC Bistra Ptuj will be a delegate for coordination and better communication among institutions. SRC Bistra Ptuj will have better insight into the startup support services provided by other institutions and will act as an agent for transfer of information across the whole stakeholder's network. In this way we can avoid doubling the services and events, but also improve services if organisation will cooperate more in their joint efforts. It is not rarely the case that two or more organisations are organising events with similar themes and with the same target audience. Sometimes it is enough if the information is flowing and the forces of several organisations can be joined in one event with higher impact. We are planning to participate in at least 5 events, organised by others annually.

2. Action

The steps of the action:

- Building the network of informing all providers of support, universities, government and startups using web pages, e-mails and social networks;
- Organisation of 6 networking and exchange of practice events;
- Monitoring and reporting.

The indicators to monitor the implementation of the action:

- Number of organisation in startup ecosystem (list)
- Number of events (list, photo material)
- Number of participants (list of participants of the event)

3. Players involved

- ZRS Bistra Ptuj (SRC Bistra Ptuj) – facilitating cooperation by informing and organisation of events;
- Tovarna podjetij (Venture Factory) – key player of Startup Maribor;
- Fundacija za izboljšanje zaposlitvenih možnosti PRIZMA, ustanova (PRIZMA Foundation for Improvement of Employment Possibilities, an institution) – key player for social economy of the region;
- University of Maribor with all the faculties and institutes – key provider of higher education and research in the region;

- Ministry of The Ministry of Economic Development and Technology – key governmental institution;
- SPIRIT Slovenia - Public Agency for Entrepreneurship, Internationalization, Foreign Investments and Technology;
- Municipalities of Podravje – local authorities
- Research development agencies in the region (Maribor, Slovenska Bistrica, Slovenske gorice, Ormož....)
- Šolski center Ptuj (School centre Ptuj);
- Manager klub Ptuj (Manager club Ptuj)
- Štajerska gospodarska zbornica (Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Štajerska);
- Gospodarska zbornica (Chamber of Commerce);
- Obrtna zbornica (Chamber of Craft);
- Partners of SocioLab project;
- Partners of SPOT svetovanje Podravje;
- Startups;
- Social enterprises and cooperatives;

4. Timeframe

Jan 2019 – Dec 2020

5. Costs

Organisation of events

6. Funding sources

Own funding

Date: 7.12.2018

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